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Baby Steps

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KC

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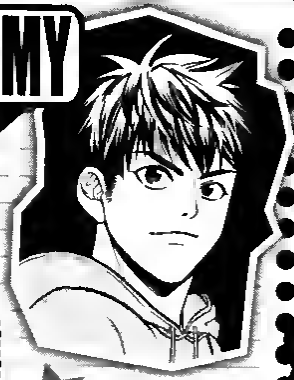
Baby Steps
10
ベイビーステップ

FL TENNIS ACADEMY in Florida

PRODUCED A BUNCH OF PLAYERS WHO BECAME NO.1 IN THE WORLD. MANY ACTIVE PROS ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY. AN IDEAL ENVIRONMENT THAT HAS EVERYTHING THAT'S NEEDED FOR TENNIS.



EI-CHAN'S ROOMMATES

ALEX

A PROFESSIONAL PLAYER WHO FINALLY MANAGED TO ADVANCE TO THE TOP 1000 IN THE WORLD RANKINGS. ALTHOUGH HE WAS AVOIDING A MATCH WITH EI-CHAN, IT FINALLY HAPPENED!

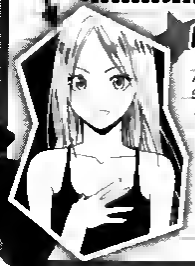
KRISHNA

OVERSEAS STUDENT FROM INDIA.

TAIRA ATSUSHI

AIMING TO BE A PRO WHILE ATTENDING SCHOOL IN AMERICA. HE TAKES CARE OF EI-CHAN BECAUSE HE'S A FELLOW JAPANESE.

SIBLINGS



MARCIA

ALEX'S LITTLE SISTER. STRONG-WILLED, AND DOESN'T GET ALONG WITH EI-CHAN FOR SOME REASON. FYI, THE SIBLINGS ARE GOOD-LOOKING.

MIKE

THE ACADEMY'S MENTAL CONDITIONING COACH. SUPPORTS EI-CHAN WHEN HE'S IN TROUBLE.

IKE SOUJI

A PROFESSIONAL PLAYER WHO'S THE SAME AGE AS EI-CHAN. HE MOVED HIS BATTLEGROUND TO AMERICA, AND IS CURRENTLY A MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY WHERE EI-CHAN WENT TO STUDY ABROAD. NACCHAN'S CHILDHOOD FRIEND, AND THE ONE WHO INSPIRED HER TO BECOME A PRO.

EI-CHAN'S LAST MATCH IN AMERICA!!

Baby Steps

ベイビーステップ

CHARACTER INTRODUCTION

EI-CHAN

MARUO EIICHIRO

A MEMBER OF STC. HE DECLARED THAT HE'LL GIVE UP ON BECOMING A PRO AND FOCUS ON HIS COLLEGE PLACEMENT EXAMS IF HE CAN'T WIN THE ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR NEXT YEAR!! IN ORDER TO GET STRONG IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME, HE'S CURRENTLY STUDYING ABROAD SHORT-TERM AT AN AMERICAN TENNIS ACADEMY!! IT SEEMS HE'S GOTTEN A STEP BETTER AFTER GOING THROUGH HIS FIRST SLUMP!!

TAKASAKI NATSU

NACCHAN

A MEMBER OF STC. THE TOP FEMALE IN KANAGAWA, SHE IS A NATIONAL-LEVEL TENNIS PLAYER. DUE TO HER OWN SHORT-TERM EXPERIENCES OVERSEAS, SHE STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT EI-CHAN GO TOO. IT'LL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW EI-CHAN'S LOVE TOWARD HER WILL WORK OUT ♥

EGAWA TAKUMA

A MEMBER OF STC. ONCE REIGNED AS THE BEST OF KANAGAWA, BUT HE'S DONE WITH THE JUNIORS AND IS GETTING READY FOR PRO REGISTRATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION!! EI-CHAN'S GOAL AND LOVE RIVAL?!

COACH AOI

ALTHOUGH HE'S EI-CHAN'S COACH AT STC, EI-CHAN IS HIS FIRST STUDENT. THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR EI-CHAN'S STUDYING TENNIS ABROAD

Baby Steps

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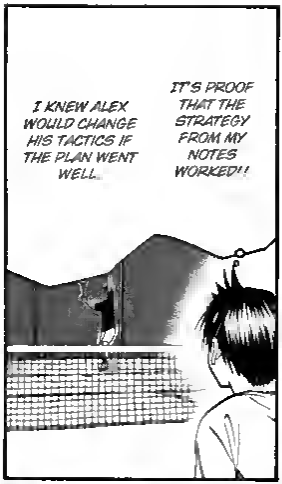
to Giant Strides

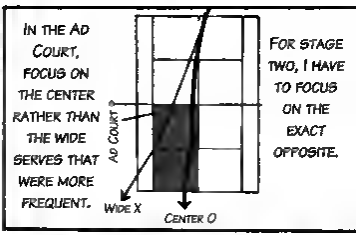
If it's data collected over just two weeks,
then I'll simply use that against you.
15 - LOVE
1 2 3
Alex 2
Maruo 4
TENNIS DIFFERENT FROM THE DATA...
THE FACT THAT ALEX CHANGED HIS TACTICS MEANS
MY STRATEGY IS TOTALLY EXPOSED...
EVEN THOUGH HE HAD A TENDENCY TO FORCE HIS WAY THROUGH USING POWERFUL SERVES AND HIS SPECIALTY FOREHAND,
HE STARTED CHANGING HIS SERVES AND MIXED IN BACKHAND SLICES THAT HE HASN'T HIT UNTIL NOW.

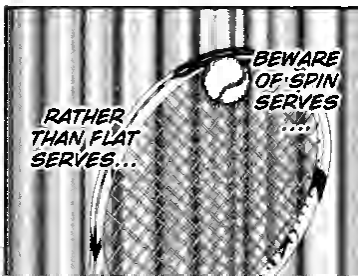
#84 DECISION OF THE 1ST SET


I KNEW ALEX WOULD CHANGE HIS TACTICS IF THE PLAN WENT WELL...
IT'S PROOF THAT THE STRATEGY FROM MY NOTES WORKED!!

IN OTHER WORDS...
STAGE ONE CLEARED!!

SPIN SERVE TO THE CENTER!!


IN THE AD COURT, FOCUS ON THE CENTER RATHER THAN THE WIDE SERVES THAT WERE MORE FREQUENT.
AD COURT
WIDE X
CENTER O
FOR STAGE TWO, I HAVE TO FOCUS ON THE EXACT OPPOSITE.


BEWARE OF SPIN SERVES ....
RATHER THAN FLAT SERVES...

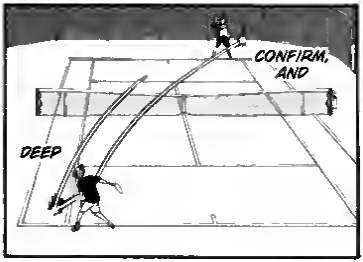
TILL NOW, HE USED TO APPROACH THE NET AFTER A SPIN SERVE
BUT... AS EXPECTED, HE DIDN'T MOVE UP!!
HA
110キロ
CONTROL TOWARD HIS BACKHAND, AND...
TAKE THE LEAD WHILE I HAVE A GOOD GRASP OF THE SITUATION!!
ﾊｯ!!
!!

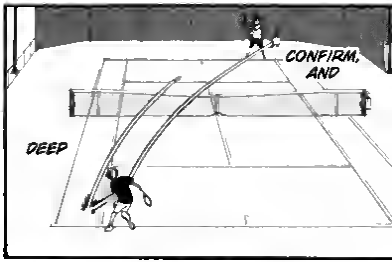
RUSH THE NET!!
He read my moves again
Why did that one get read?
15 – 15
ALRIGHT!!

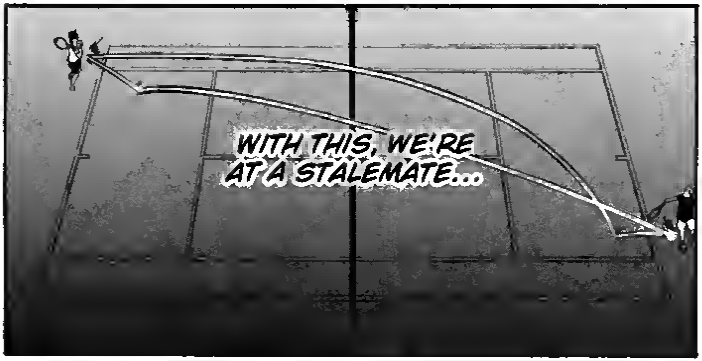
A BACKHAND SLICE!
I HAVE TO SET IT UP SO ALEX WILL BE CHAINED TO THE BASELINE
IT'S NOT AS STRONG AS A TOPSPIN SHOT, BUT SINCE IT HAS A LONG AIR TIME, IT'S EASIER FOR ALEX TO GO FOR A VOLLEY
DEEP TOWARD HIS BACKHAND!!
ONCE I CONFIRM THAT HE'S NOT MOVING UP,

ANYWAY, WHILE WATCHING OUT FOR A VOLLEY AND MAKING SURE NOT TO LET HIM HIT WITH HIS FOREHAND...
THERE'S NO NEED TO RUSH SINCE HIS SLICE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH DECISIVENESS.

He's watching out for my volleys.
LEGE


CONFIRM, AND
DEEP


CONFIRM, AND
DEEP

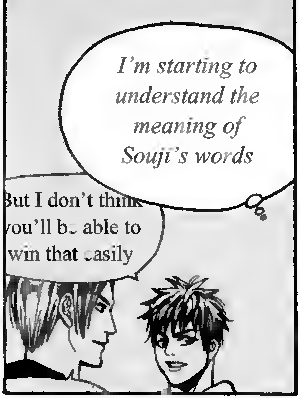

WITH THIS, WE'RE AT A STALEMATE...

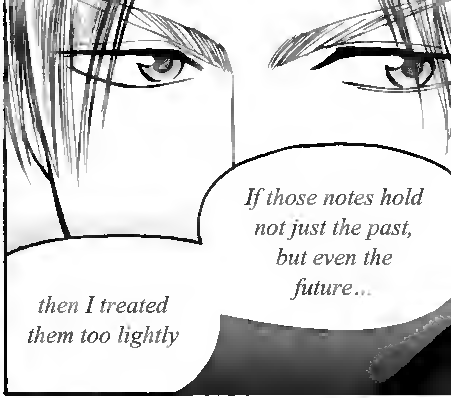
BE THE FIRST TO MOVE!!
IN THIS SITUATION, ALEX WILL DEFINITELY...
REPEATING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER... A BATTLE OF ENDURANCE.
THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE PATTERNS:
OR DOWN THE LINE WITH HIS SPECIALTY FOREHAND AFTER RUNNING AROUND THE BACKHAND...
A DOWN THE LINE BACKHAND SHOT WITH A TOP SPIN,
IF IT'S ALEX, THERE'S A HIGH POSSIBILITY THAT HE'LL GO WITH THE FOREHAND.
BUT WATCH OUT FOR THE OTHER ONE TOO, JUST IN CASE...

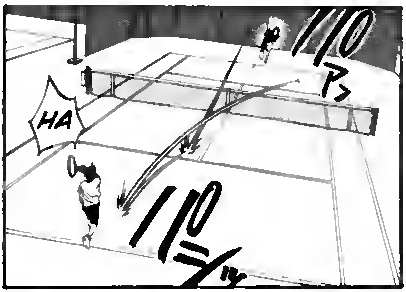
HERE IT COMES!!
COLLEGE

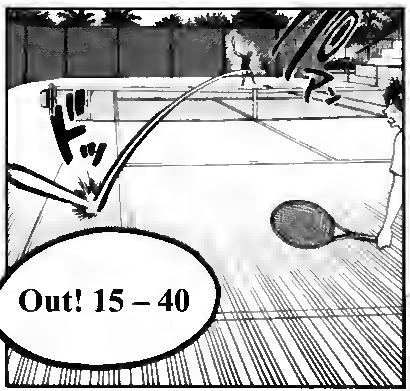
ARGH
HA
DA

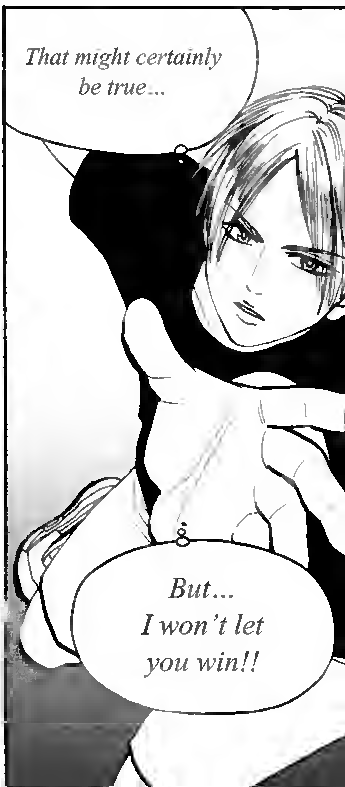
Amazing!! He returned that forehand with a winner!!
Based on his moves, he definitely saw that coming.
15 - 30
ALRIGHT!!
It's not technique He's getting ahead by reading my moves
With that, I understand now
Does it mean he even simulated cases for when his strategy is used against him?
He already took into account all the possible changes I can make?
Good at preparing for class

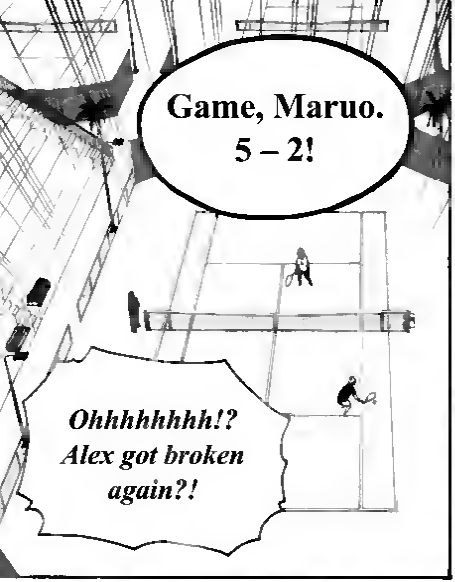

I'm starting to understand the meaning of Souji's words
But I don't think you'll be able to win that easily


If those notes hold not just the past, but even the future...
then I treated them too lightly

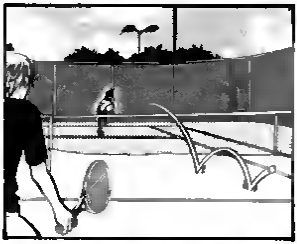

HA


Out! 15 – 40


That might certainly be true...
But... I won't let you win!!


Game, Maruo.
5 – 2!
Ohhhhhhhh!?
Alex got broken
again?!

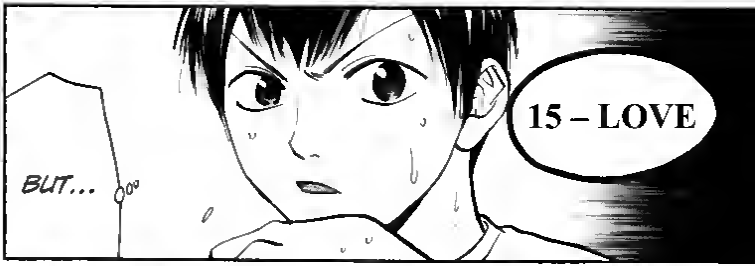
HA



ALEX'S MISSES STARTED TO INCREASE SUDDENLY.

HA
I CAN GAIN A ONE-SET LEAD!
IF I CAN HOLD THIS GAME,

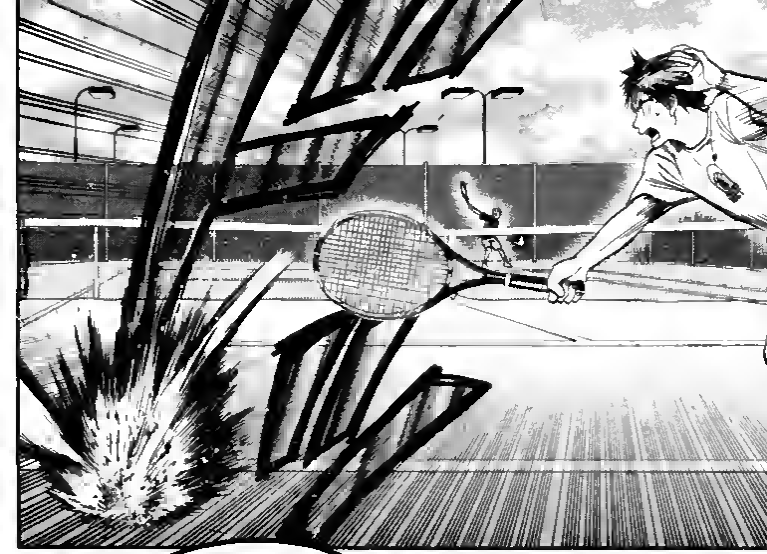
HA
BEING ABLE TO QUICKLY REACT TO ALEX'S CHANGE-UP AT 4-2 WAS BIG.


15 – LOVE
BUT...

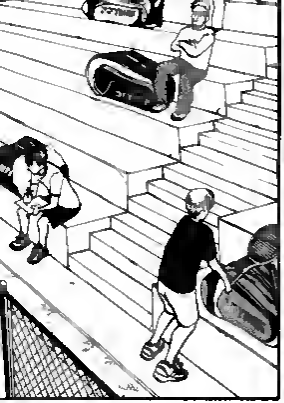
IT'S NOT JUST TRYING TO DO THE OPPOSITE OF MY DATA OR TRYING TO CATCH ME OFF GUARD.
INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON FOREHAND-CENTERED ATTACKS, HE'S ALSO ATTACKING WITH HIS BACKHAND.!!
!?

SINCE THAT 4-2 GAME, ALEX'S TENNIS STARTED TO CHANGE AGAIN...
COLLEGE

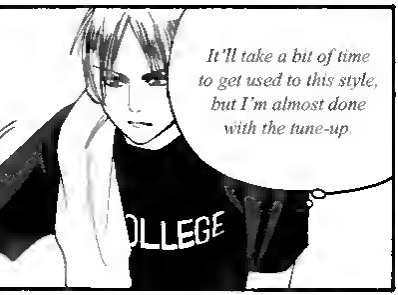
CHANGING THE FOUNDATION OF HIS STYLE DURING A MATCH.
SOMETHING TOTALLY IMPLAUSIBLE FOR A PLAYER OF HIS LEVEL:
COLLEGE
BUT IF THOSE START TO GO IN...
THAT IS WHY HE'S MAKING A LOT OF MISTAKES,

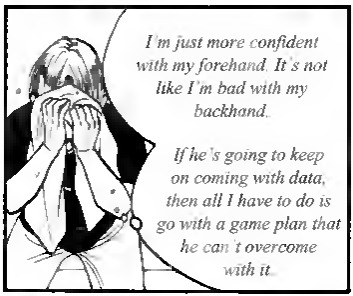


Out!
First set won by Maruo. Count: 6 – 2
Unbelievable!! Maruo took the first set!!
Does this mean he'd have won if it wasn't 3 sets??
Nah, I'm sure Alex is playing with three sets in mind



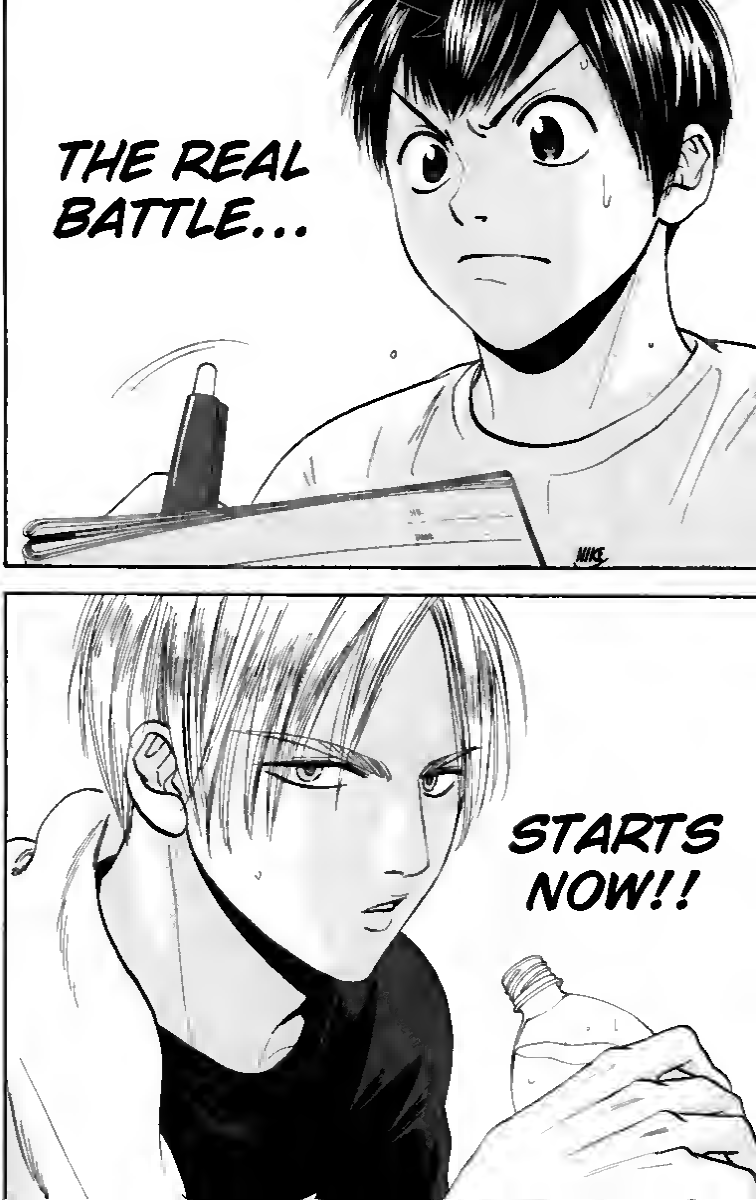
Alright...
that was about one ball length off
COLLEGE


It'll take a bit of time to get used to this style, but I'm almost done with the tune-up.
OLLEGE


I'm just more confident with my forehand. It's not like I'm bad with my backhand.
If he's going to keep on coming with data, then all I have to do is go with a game plan that he can't overcome with it.

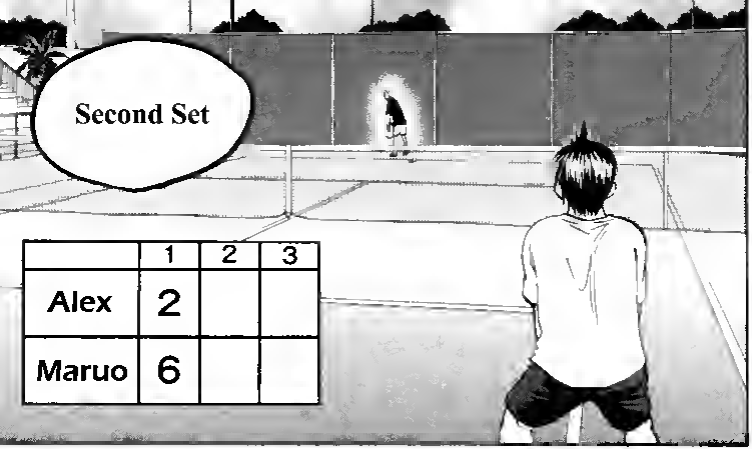
THAT AGGRESSIVE BACKHAND WILL START GOING IN EVENTUALLY
...
IN THAT CASE, I CAN'T USE THE STRATEGY I'VE BEEN USING TILL NOW.

Those really are well made notes.
カキ カキ カキ

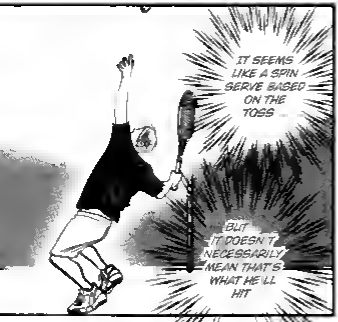

THE REAL BATTLE...
NIKE
STARTS NOW!!

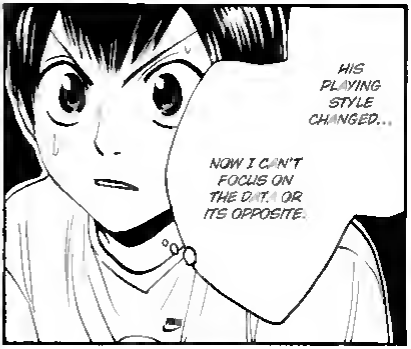
Alex is acting pretty strange isn't he... For him to keep making errors with his backhand.
Well, yeah
I mean, isn't he the type who aggressively switches to his forehand when his backhand gets targeted?
Of course, there is also the fact that Maruo is supressing his forehand unexpectedly well
But it seems like he's doing it on purpose
Really?
But more than that, I think he noticed how meticulously he was analyzed.
I think you start to see yourself with mirror-like clarity if you get dissected in Maruo's notes
If that's the case,

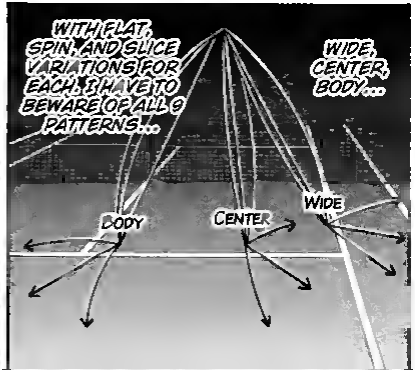
Then I can totally understand how badly he wants to surpass himself
ATHLETICS WEST
#85 SURPASS



	1	2	3
Alex	2		
Maruo	6		







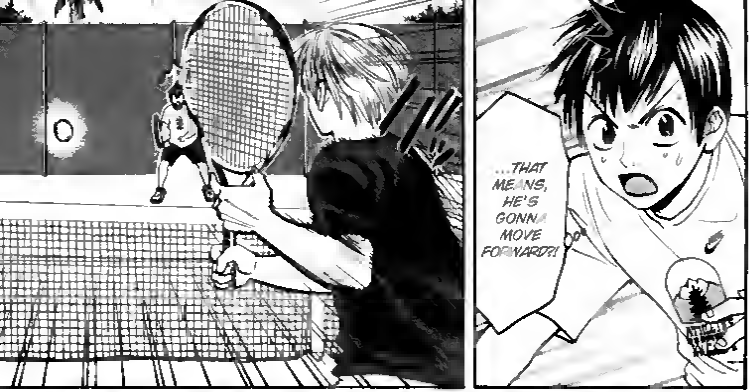
RGH

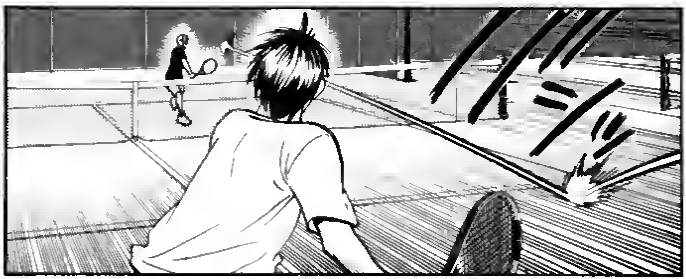
SPIN TOWARD THE BODY!!

15 – LOVE
MY REACTIONS ARE A STEP SLOWER
EVEN THOUGH THE POWER DIDN'T CHANGE MUCH, SINCE I'M WATCHING FOR OTHER POSSIBLE SHOTS,

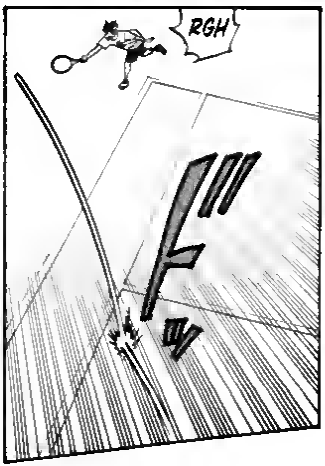
SPIN TOWARD THE CENTER!!

ISN'T THERE ANYTHING? A WAY TO REDUCE THESE POSSIBILITIES EVEN A BIT

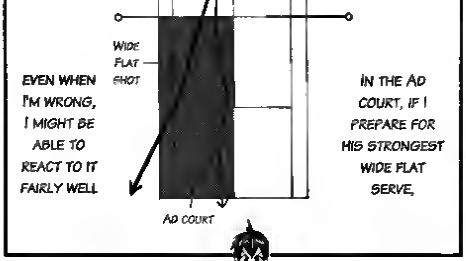

...THAT MEANS, HE'S GONNA MOVE FORWARD?!



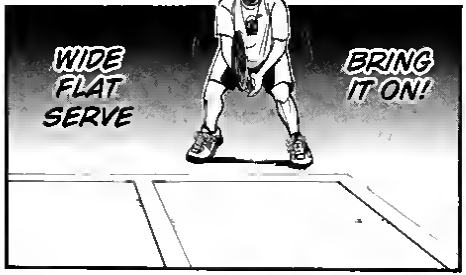
40 – LOVE
HE USED HIS PREFERRED WIDE SLICE!!

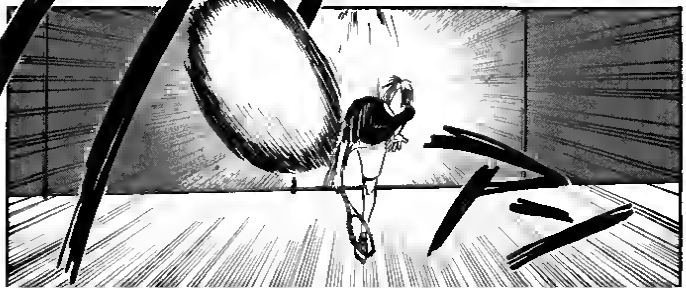

RGH
ドン

30 – LOVE
SHOOT.. EVEN IF I KNOW WHAT'S COMING NEXT, SINCE I'M A STEP SLOWER REACTING TO THE SERVE, MY RETURNS HAVE GOTTEN WEAK.


WIDE FLAT SHOT
EVEN WHEN I'M WRONG, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO REACT TO IT FAIRLY WELL
IN THE AD COURT, IF I PREPARE FOR HIS STRONGEST WIDE FLAT SERVE,
AD COURT

CALM DOWN...
WHEN THE OPPONENT SERVES, I'M THE ONE AT A DISADVANTAGE.
SO I HAVE TO PLAY THE ODDS
NE—?


WIDE FLAT SERVE
BRING IT ON!



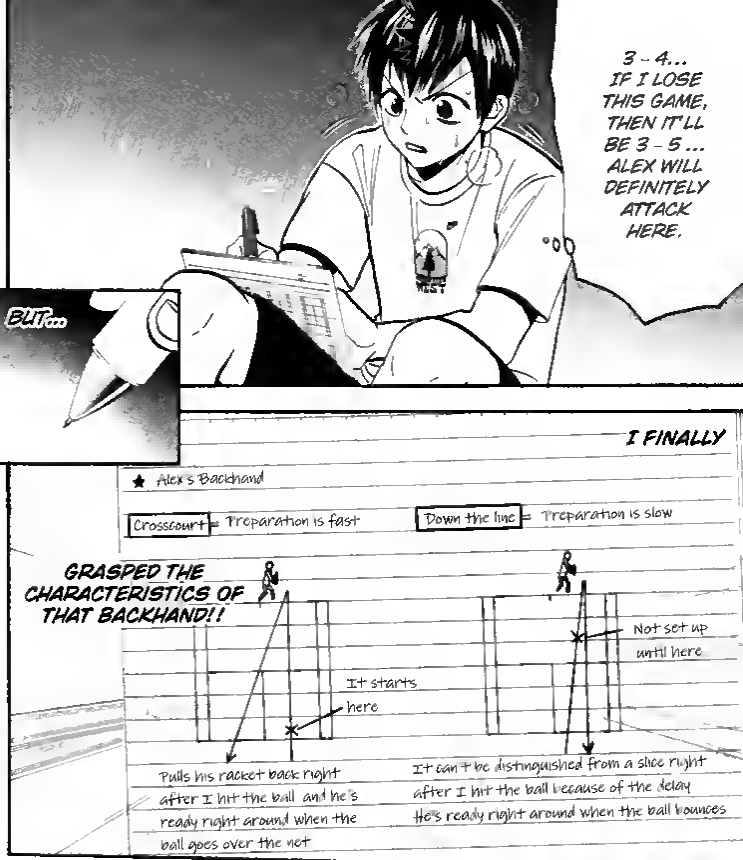
I RETURNED IT!!
WIDE SLICE!!
EVEN THOUGH IT'S A BIT WEAKER,
IT CUTS TO THE INSIDE!!
DOWN THE LINE? CROSS-COURT?!
COME ON... HE'S GOING TO ATTACK WITH HIS BACKHAND!!

Game, Alex
1 – 0
ARGH...
FINALLY... HIS BACKHAND HAS STARTED TO GO IN!!
THIS TOO... SINCE IT'S NOT IN THE DATA, I REACTED TO IT A STEP SLOWER...
COLLEGE

I DEFINITELY HAVE TO HOLD MINE!!
IT'LL BE DIFFICULT TO BREAK ALEX'S SERVE FROM NOW ON...
EVEN IF IT'S STARTING TO GO IN, AN "OFFENSIVE BACKHAND" HAS TO BE RISKY.
ALEX IS PLAYING IN A STYLE HE'S NOT USED TO. WHICH MEANS
I SHOULDN'T STOP FOCUSING MY ATTACK ON HIS BACKHAND
HA
THAT'S DEFINITELY THE WAY TO BEAT HIM!!
15 ~ LOVE
10
P-1

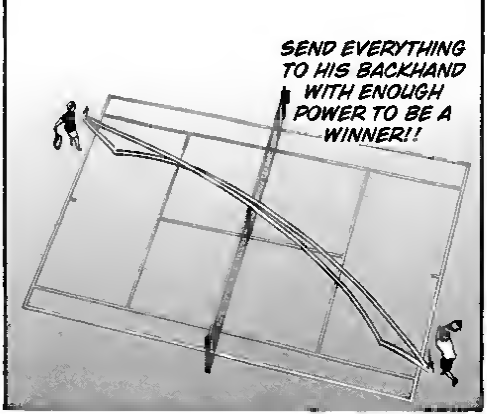
Yup! See ya!
See ya tomorrow Marcia!
Yawn
I'm so tired~~!!
But, I gotta work hard, r... so I don't make my brother worry
Aa
That's right I wonder what he's doing right now

But ever since the second set began, his backhand started to go in, so Alex has the upper hand.
Maruo's been struggling through deuces to hold his serve, while Alex has held his without a problem
Hey, Atsushi. What's the score right now?
Maruo took the first set, and right now it's 3 – 3 in the second set.
Wha…why's my brother losing?!
It's cause he's had a lot of misses from his backhand…
RGH
Game, Alex.
4 – 3

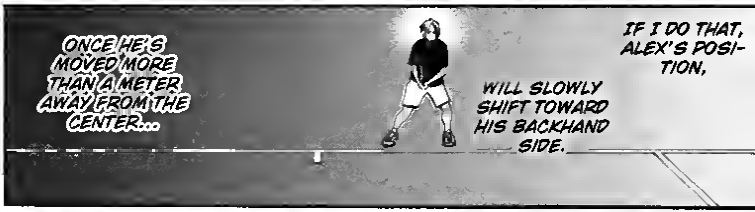

3 – 4... IF I LOSE THIS GAME, THEN IT'LL BE 3 – 5... ALEX WILL DEFINITELY ATTACK HERE.
BUT...
I FINALLY
★ Alex's Backhand
Crosscourt = Preparation is fast
Down the line = Preparation is slow
GRASPED THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THAT BACKHAND!!
It starts here
Not set up until here
Pulls his racket back right after I hit the ball and he's ready right around when the ball goes over the net
It can't be distinguished from a slice right after I hit the ball because of the delay
He's ready right around when the ball bounces

IF I CAN HOLD MY SERVE USING THIS, I CAN TURN THE SITUATION AROUND!!

Alex
...He's laughing?!
I HAVE TO HIT ALL MY SERVES TO HIS BACK-HAND
Time!
THIS IS ALSO TO HIS BACKHAND!!
HA


SEND EVERYTHING TO HIS BACKHAND WITH ENOUGH POWER TO BE A WINNER!!

COLLEGE


ONCE HE'S MOVED MORE THAN A METER AWAY FROM THE CENTER...
IF I DO THAT, ALEX'S POSITION,
WILL SLOWLY SHIFT TOWARD HIS BACKHAND SIDE.

Ha
EVEN IF THE FOREHAND IS HIS SPECIALTY, IF I MAKE HIM HIT IT ON THE RUN, IT SHOULDN'T COME BACK WITH THAT MUCH POWER.

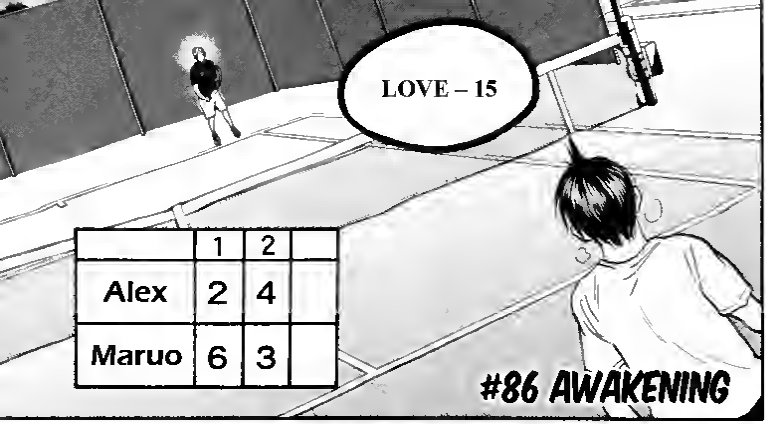
POWER SHOT TO HIS FOREHAND!!

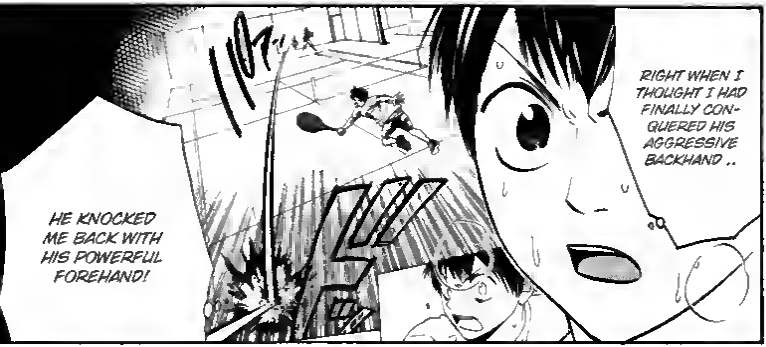
MOVE UP!!
AND SEND THAT TO HIS BACKHAND AGAIN...
THERE'S A LOW POSSIBILITY THAT I'LL BE ABLE TO HIT A DECISIVE SHOT FROM THE BASELINE, SO...!!
ALEX'S BACKHAND IS INCREASING IN STABILITY AND POWER.
IF IT'S SLOW, THEN IT'LL GO DOWN THE LINE!!
IF HIS PREPARATION IS QUICK, IT'LL GO CROSS-COURT!!
WHICH ONE IS IT?!
BRING IT ON!!

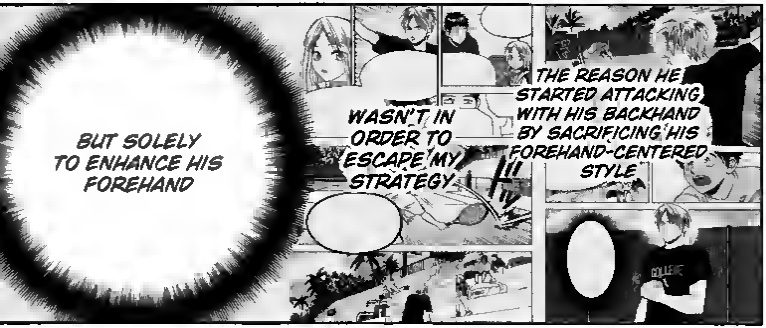
INSIDE-OUT...
FOREHAND?!

THERE...
AT THAT MOMENT... A FOREHAND?!
0 – 15

This is it…
An aggressive backhand enhances my forehand.
……


LOVE – 15
1
2
Alex
2
4
Maruo
6
3
#86 AWAKENING

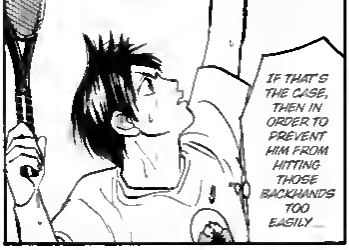

HE KNOCKED ME BACK WITH HIS POWERFUL FOREHAND!
RIGHT WHEN I THOUGHT I HAD FINALLY CONQUERED HIS AGGRESSIVE BACKHAND ..


BUT SOLELY TO ENHANCE HIS FOREHAND
WASN'T IN ORDER TO ESCAPE MY STRATEGY
THE REASON HE STARTED ATTACKING WITH HIS BACKHAND BY SACRIFICING HIS FOREHAND-CENTERED STYLE

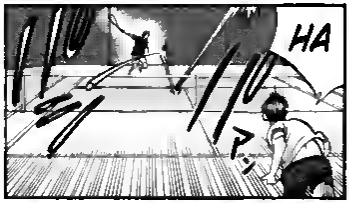
IF HIS PREPARATION IS SLOW,
IT'S DOWN THE LINE!!
BUT, IF IT'S A BACKHAND, I CAN READ WHERE HE'S GOING TO HIT..
FOR NOW, ALL I CAN DO IS CONCENTRATE ON THAT AND WAIT FOR MY CHANCE!!
HA
IS THIS NOT ENOUGH?!
CRAP.. EVEN IF I CAN READ IT, IT'S STILL TOUGH
RGH

Using an aggressive backhand creates a chance
Rather than trying to force my way through with just my forehand...
I can focus more on choosing when to hit it.
I can surpass... COLLET

HA!
my past!!
0 – 30
IF IT'S EVEN A LITTLE TOO WEAK, HE BRINGS OUT HIS POWERFUL FOREHAND..
Amazing!! Good shot Alex!!


IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT HIM FROM HITTING THOSE BACKHANDS TOO EASILY...

I KNEW IT IN THE END, HE WAS ALWAYS GOING TO FIGHT WITH HIS FAVORITE FOREHAND!!
He's stubborn

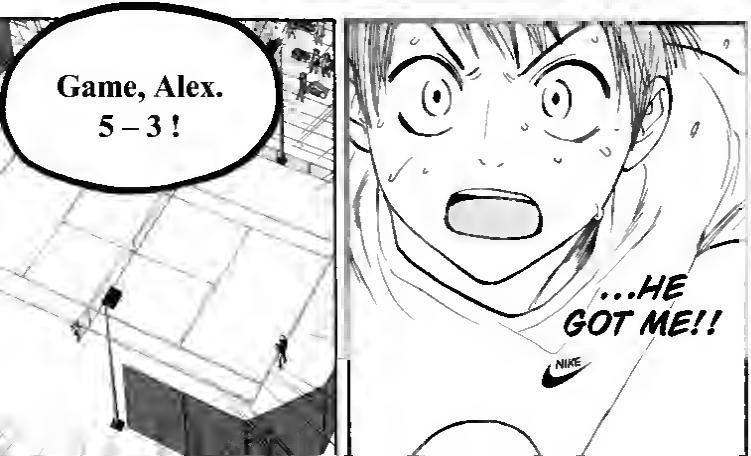

HA

AIM A BIT CLOSER TO THE LINES!!

Out
LOVE – 40
CRAP
COLLEGE

WHILE WATCHING OUT FOR HIS FOREHAND, HIT TO HIS BACK-HAND WITHOUT HITTING TOO WEAK...
NO... DON'T BE INTIMIDATED!!
AS LONG AS I DON'T CARE-LESSLY MOVE UP FOR A VOLLEY, HE SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TAKE A POINT THAT EASILY
IT'LL BE BAD IF I LOSE THIS GAME BECAUSE I CAN'T READ HIS SERVE AT ALL
SHOOT, IT'S BREAK POINT!!
!!
HA
WHAT...

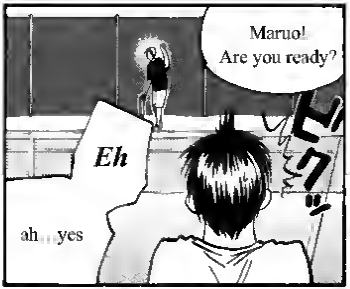
A FOREHAND RETURN!?

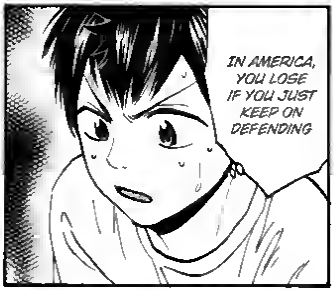

Game, Alex. 5 – 3 !
...HE GOT ME!!
NIKE

Yup!
He can do it
Even if he was fully expecting those backhand-only serves,
that forehand was better than his usual.
Using his lead to take a gamble with his return. That's just like him.
This feeling... it's been a while
IF I DON'T BREAK THE NEXT GAME, I'LL LOSE THE SET.
HE BROKE MY SERVE ...

BUT... THAT SORT OF DEFENSIVE STRATEGY ISN'T ENOUGH.

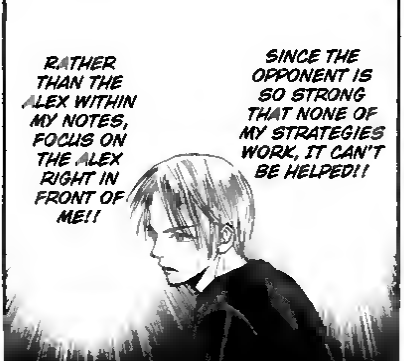
AND SEND IT TOWARD HIS BACKHAND,
TO COUNTER ALEX'S UNPREDICTABLE SERVES...
AT THE VERY LEAST, I HAVE TO RETURN IT PROPERLY...
THEN GET READY FOR HIS POWERFUL FOREHAND.


Maruo! Are you ready?
Eh
ah yes

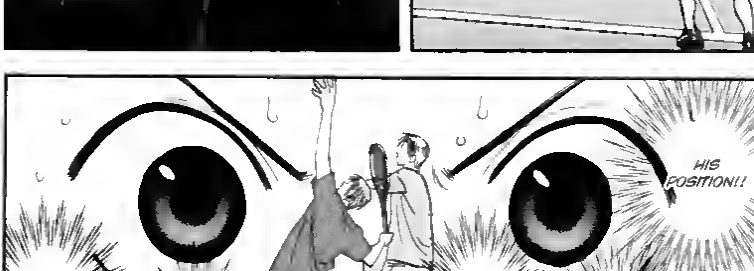

IN AMERICA, YOU LOSE IF YOU JUST KEEP ON DEFENDING

THERE'S NO TIME TO STRATEGIZE ANYMORE
IF THAT'S THE CASE .

CRAP... I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING!!


RATHER THAN THE ALEX WITHIN MY NOTES, FOCUS ON THE ALEX RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME!!
SINCE THE OPPONENT IS SO STRONG THAT NONE OF MY STRATEGIES WORK, IT CAN'T BE HELPED!!

MAKE THE PLAN SIMPLE!!
"DON'T LET HIM HIT THE FOREHAND EASILY"
THAT'S ALL!!


FORM!!
TOSS
LINE OF SIGHT!
STANCE
HIS POSITION!!

AND FIGHT!!
COLLEGE
FOCUS ONLY ON THE DATA RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY EYES,

ALRIGHT, I RETURNED IT!
A SPIN SERVE OUT WIDE!!
WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH THIS?!
DOWN THE LINE...
CROSSCOURT!!
HA

WHERE I SHOULD HIT THIS BALL IS..
IT'S IN... BUT IT'S GOING TO COME BACK!!
SOMEWHERE WITHIN THIS RANGE...
I'LL DECIDE WHEN I HIT!!

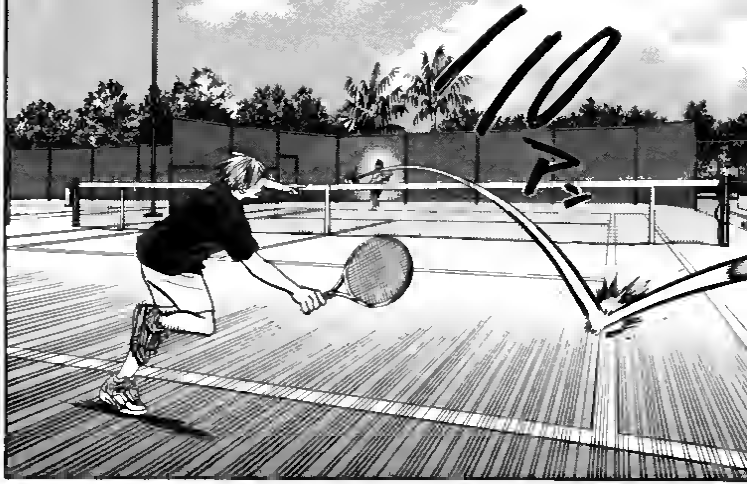
It's deep...
Ah!? He's moving up!!
Oh? Nice
...HUH?!

LOVE – 15
COLLEGE
...Did his shots get a bit stronger too?
AND I WASN'T SCARED
BUT... IT WASN'T RECKLESS
IN FACT, I EVEN GOT A POINT...
I GOT SLAMMED WHEN I WENT UP FOR A VOLLEY BEFORE, AND I DIDN'T HAVE A STRATEGY
WHY DID I MOVE UP FOR A VOLLEY JUST NOW?!
WHA...
WHY?!
I'M RETURNING MUCH BETTER THAN THE LAST GAME!!
IT'S TOUGH... BUT...
RGH

Hey... didn't their strokes get a level higher ever since this game began?
Yeah, you're right It's a pretty amazing rally
ここまで
WHAT IS THIS...?!

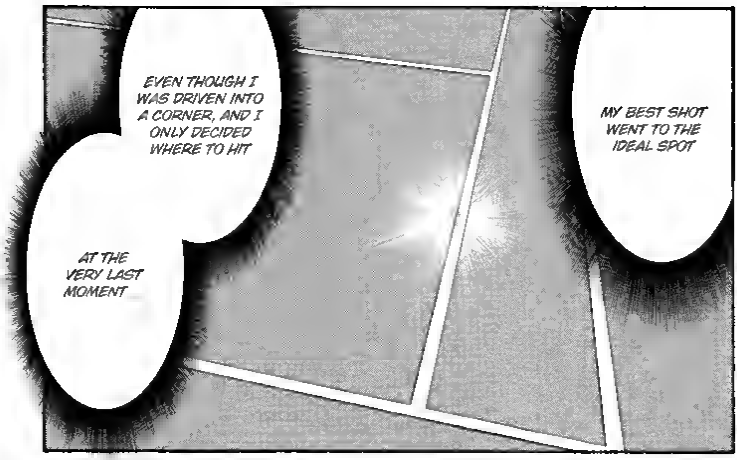
THIS FEELING
OF MY BODY...

REACTING A STEP FASTER THAN MY BRAIN
ATHLETIC
WEST

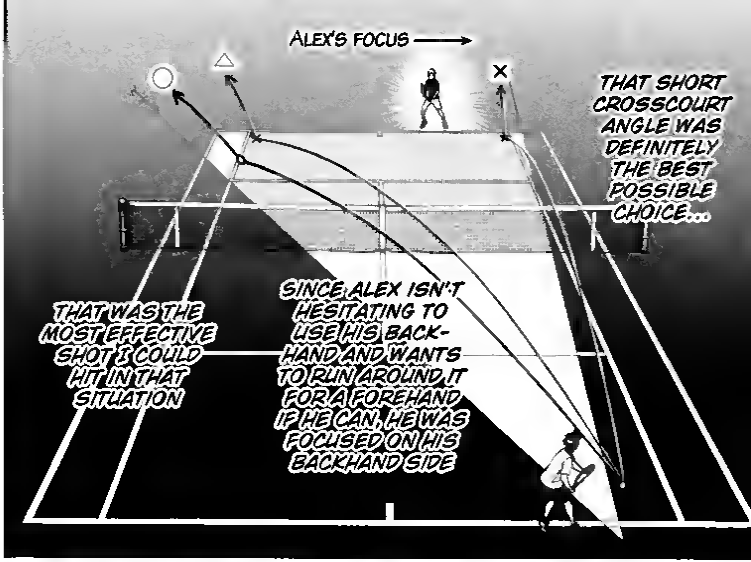


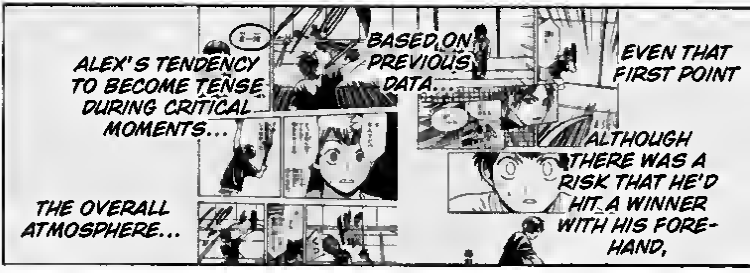
LOVE – 30

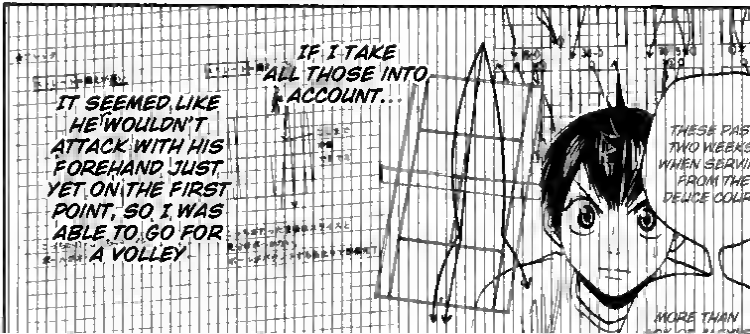
#87 SELF-AWARENESS


EVEN THOUGH I WAS DRIVEN INTO A CORNER, AND I ONLY DECIDED WHERE TO HIT
MY BEST SHOT WENT TO THE IDEAL SPOT
AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT

DOES THAT MEAN MY BODY... MY INSTINCT... IS MUCH MORE AWARE OF
WHAT THE IDEAL SHOT IS AND HOW I SHOULD HIT?
THIS ISN'T A COINCIDENCE...
DID MY BODY MOVE BETTER BECAUSE I WASN'T USING MY BRAIN AS MUCH?
REACHED A PINNACLE IN THIS MATCH...
ALL THE CONTROL TRAINING I'VE DONE SO FAR
ATHLETICS WEST


ALEX'S FOCUS
THAT SHORT CROSSCOURT ANGLE WAS DEFINITELY THE BEST POSSIBLE CHOICE...
THAT WAS THE MOST EFFECTIVE SHOT I COULD HIT IN THAT SITUATION
SINCE ALEX ISN'T HESITATING TO USE HIS BACK-HAND AND WANTS TO RUN AROUND IT FOR A FOREHAND IF HE CAN, HE WAS FOCUSED ON HIS BACKHAND SIDE

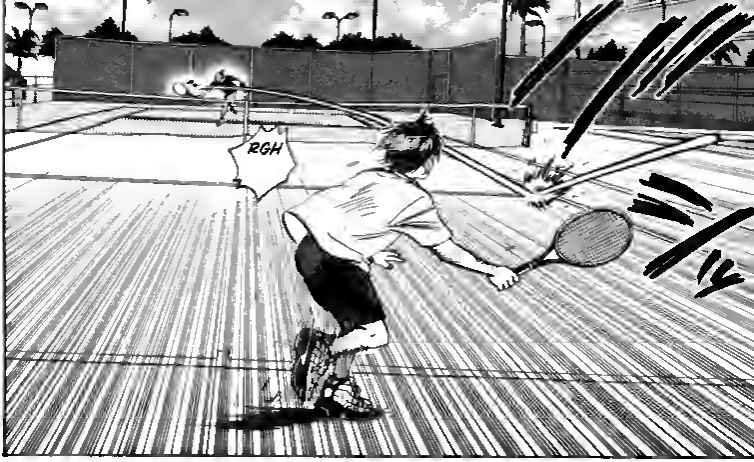

ALEX'S TENDENCY TO BECOME TENSE DURING CRITICAL MOMENTS...
BASED ON PREVIOUS DATA...
EVEN THAT FIRST POINT
ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A RISK THAT HE'D HIT A WINNER WITH HIS FORE-HAND,
THE OVERALL ATMOSPHERE...


IT SEEMED LIKE HE WOULDN'T ATTACK WITH HIS FOREHAND JUST YET ON THE FIRST POINT, SO I WAS ABLE TO GO FOR A VOLLEY
IF I TAKE ALL THOSE INTO ACCOUNT...
THESE PAS TWO WEEKS WHEN SERVI FROM THE DEUCE COU
MORE THAN

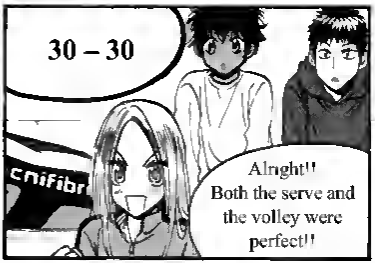
ANYWAY... LET'S TRY IT ONCE MORE!!
IF IT'S ABOUT THE THINGS I'VE BEEN WRITING IN MY NOTES,
RATHER THAN CONSCIOUSLY PONDERING ABOUT EVERY LITTLE DETAIL,
IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO LET MY INTUITION MAKE THE DECISION.
.....
NOW, STOP USING YOUR BRAIN!! ONCE THE PLAY STARTS..

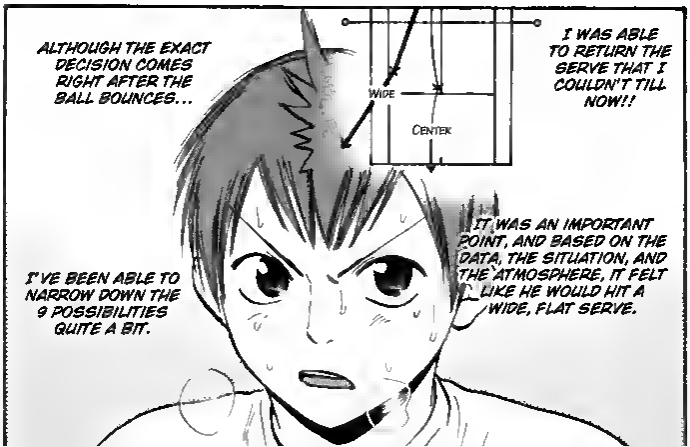
15 – 30
DON'T THINK!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, ACTUALLY EMPTYING YOUR HEAD LIKE THAT!!
WRONG!! WRONG!!
TRUST THAT MY INSTINCTS WILL TAKE CARE OF IT EVERY INSTANT...
AS FOR THE OLD DATA..
IT'S MORE LIKE... WATCH ALEX AND THE ENTIRE COURT.
CONCENTRATE ONLY ON THE DATA IN FRONT OF ME.

FOCUS ON THE BALL!!
TA
COLLEGE


RGH

BUT, THAT WASN'T BAD!!
HE GOT ME!!


30 – 30
Alright!! Both the serve and the volley were perfect!!

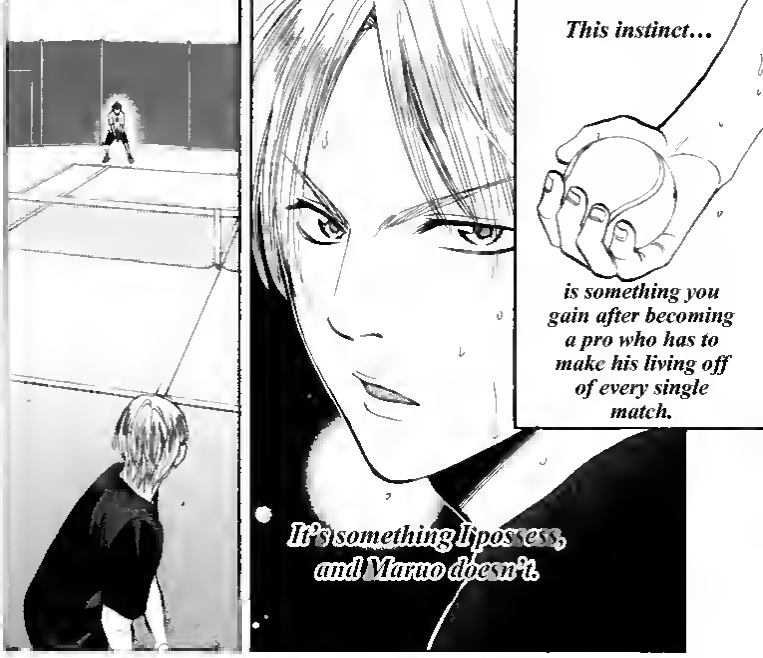

ALTHOUGH THE EXACT DECISION COMES RIGHT AFTER THE BALL BOUNCES...
I'VE BEEN ABLE TO NARROW DOWN THE 9 POSSIBILITIES QUITE A BIT.
WIDE
CENTER
I WAS ABLE TO RETURN THE SERVE THAT I COULDN'T TILL NOW!!
IT WAS AN IMPORTANT POINT, AND BASED ON THE DATA, THE SITUATION, AND THE ATMOSPHERE, IT FELT LIKE HE WOULD HIT A WIDE, FLAT SERVE.

Even though it's 5 – 3 in my favor, it'll be dangerous if I lose this one…

I can feel it intuitively.

He started returning my serves for the first time in this set.

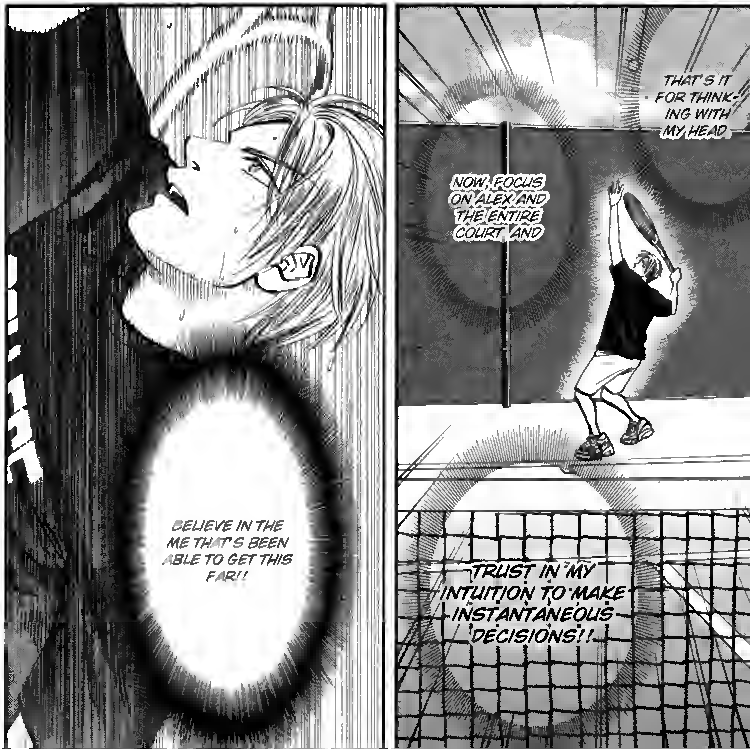
As expected… Something changed during this game.


This instinct…
is something you gain after becoming a pro who has to make his living off of every single match.
It's something I possess, and Maruo doesn't.

ATHLETICS WEST
COLLEGE

Being able to score a point in this situation shows he's a pro.
40 – 30
RGH

EVEN IF I CAN REACT TO IT PRETTY WELL, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE IF IT'S THAT POWERFUL...
SOMEHOW... AS LONG AS I CAN RETURN HIS SERVE PROPERLY...


THAT'S IT FOR THINKING WITH MY HEAD
NOW, FOCUS ON ALEX AND THE ENTIRE COURT AND
TRUST IN MY INTUITION TO MAKE INSTANTANEOUS DECISIONS!!
BELIEVE IN THE ME THAT'S BEEN ABLE TO GET THIS FAR!!

HA
He returned my all-out serve perfectly...

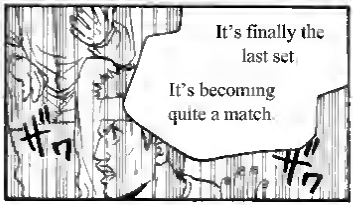
HA

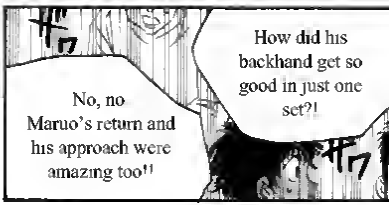
HA
THAT'S SOME CRAZY SHOT!!
IS IT IN?!
ドゥン

You know, my backhand...
is a weapon now!!
RIGHT DOWN THE LINE!!

RGH
Second set,
won by Alex.
Count: 6 – 3.
Yes!
EGE

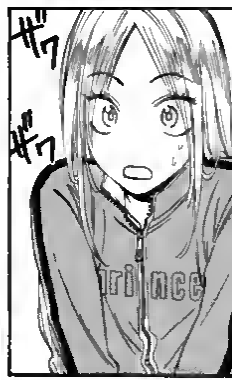
オオオオ
WOWWW!!
Awesome!!


It's finally the last set.
It's becoming quite a match.


How did his backhand get so good in just one set?!
No, no. Maruo's return and his approach were amazing too!!

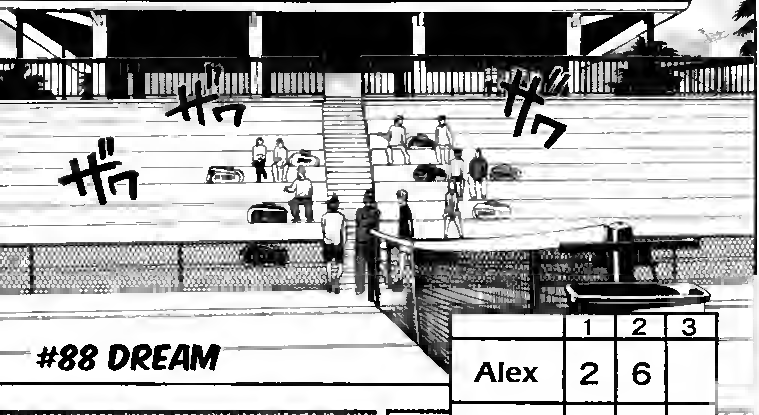
EVEN THOUGH I KNEW IT WAS COMING, I COULDN'T GET IT.

COLLEGE



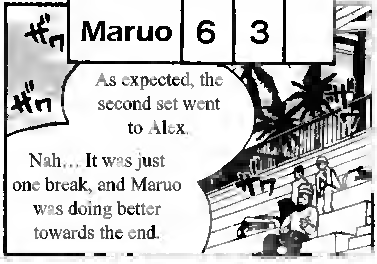
INCREDIBLE...
I'M PLAYING AN INCREDIBLE MATCH AGAINST AN INCREDIBLE PERSON!!

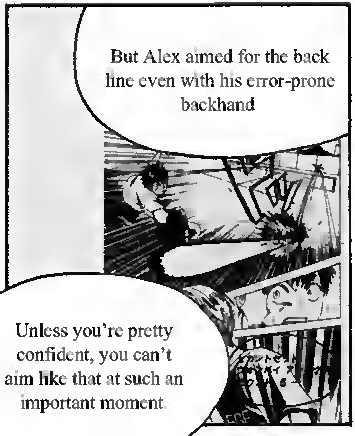
Tried giving him an unlikely expression...
Looks like someone else.

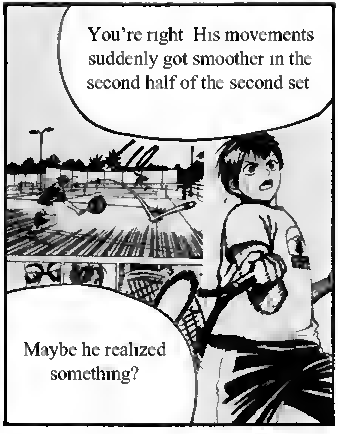


#88 DREAM

	1	2	3
Alex	2	6	
Maruo	6	3	




But Alex aimed for the back line even with his error-prone backhand
Unless you're pretty confident, you can't aim like that at such an important moment.



His forehand is no longer his only weapon.
That shot was more than enough proof.
From this point on
From this point on, even though Maruo is a player aiming to win Japan's Junior Tournament,
I shouldn't think of him as an average amateur player.
I thought he was the type of person who couldn't achieve big dreams and lacks confidence, but that wasn't it.
Although each one of them is tiny, if he achieves a lot of them it ends up becoming huge
He's the type of person who keeps on achieving small, yet innumerable dreams one by one

Rather than the distant future, he prioritizes winning the single point in front of him.
That's the mind-set of a pro.
If he made it this far like that in just a year and a half,
then as a pro, I absolutely cannot lose to him!!
IT'S WORKING ...
I'M FIGHTING AN EVEN MATCH AGAINST A PRO!!
THERE'S A REAL CHANCE FOR ME TO WIN!!
Ah

I HAVE TO HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE!!
NO... THAT'S NOT ENOUGH!!
BUT DURING PLAY, IT'S THE OPPOSITE.
LEAVE IT UP TO MY INSTINCTS.
BELIEVE IN WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING SO FAR, AND
JUST LIKE I'VE BEEN DOING SO FAR, RECAP AND PLAN AHEAD
WORK MY BRAIN TO ITS FULLEST EXTENT
DURING CHANGE-OVERS, GATHER THE DATA AND ANALYZE
Time

TRUST MY INSTINCTS!
THERE ARE BACKHAND SHOTS I CAN'T REACH EVEN IF I KNOW THEY'RE COMING
IT'S FAR TOO RISKY TO KEEP AIMING FOR IT EXCLUSIVELY... SO WHAT SHOULD I DO...
THE TIME FOR REASONING IS OVER.
THE REST DEPENDS ON THE OPPONENT'S MOVEMENT...
BELIEVE IN MYSELF, AND...
From now on I'll fight using my obvious advantage over him...
POWER!!

HE'S FORCING HIS WAY UP?!
COLLEGE
IT'S HEAVY.
RGH
BUT I SOMEHOW GOT IT LOW!
RIGHT... LEFT... UP...

DECIDE WHERE TO HIT AFTER OBSERVING THE OPPONENT...
What's he gonna do?!
Don't be timid on the return game!!
15 – LOVE
ALRIGHT

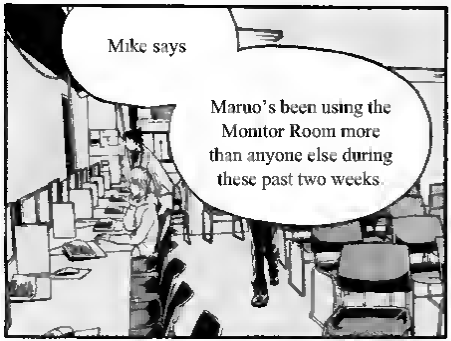
Even though it's not that hard, he's hitting to the right spot... Is he doing that on purpose?
Probably.

IF I CAN KEEP THIS UP, HE WON'T BE ABLE TO READ MY MOVES.
SINCE EVEN I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'LL DO TILL THE VERY LAST MOMENT.

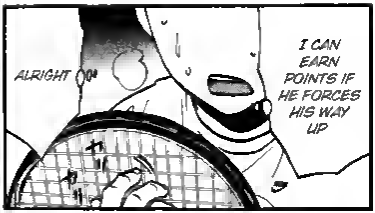
I can't read him.
COLLEGE

Practice methods for improving control
(Maruo Eiichiro)
Why easier ?
You saw it... Maruo's practice schedule.

He seems to have invested an incredible amount of time on control.
SO THAT'S WHY HE HAS SUCH HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR HIM


Mike says
Maruo's been using the Monitor Room more than anyone else during these past two weeks.

Leave it to me!
Beware of these two!
INSTINCT
REASON


ALRIGHT
I CAN EARN POINTS IF HE FORCES HIS WAY UP

IT'S SIMILAR TO WHAT AOI-SAN SAID
I'M START-ING TO GET THE HANG OF IT

IN ORDER TO DIRECT MY BODY DURING PLAYS
BUT I CAN'T LET HIM USE HIS FOREHAND THAT EASILY
THERE'S NO POINT IN ALWAYS BEING BACK-HAND BY MORE
MY INTUITION IS PROPERLY LISTENING
TO ALL THE THINGS I'M THINKING WITH MY CONSCIOUS MIND IN BETWEEN POINTS

HA

On court, absurd amounts of data are required to control the ball.
Moreover, one's own footwork, power, form, and aim are connected to each of these things...
The opponent's position, movement, the ball's trajectory, power, spin .. You begin to decide on the target only once you grasp all of these.
It's basically impossible to instantaneously process all of these data consciously.
Therefore, it was right for Eiichiro to move based on his intuition.

With this, the thrill of the match jumps dramatically.
Against Eiichiro who holds his serve by means of control,
Alex uses his powerful serve and strokes to hold his.
Game, Maruo 3 – 2.
Game, Alex. 4 – 4.
With neither of them allowing the opponent to break,
the match proceeds to the 9th game,
the 10th game, and...

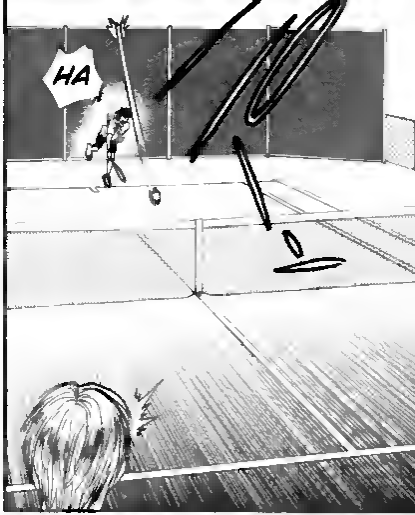
RGH
Game, Alex.
6 – 6.
THE MATCH FINALLY GOES TO A TIEBREAK!!
NO... DON'T BE INTIMIDATED.
THIS IS IT.
RATHER THAN HIS POWER DIMINISHING, IT'S ACTUALLY INCREASING?!

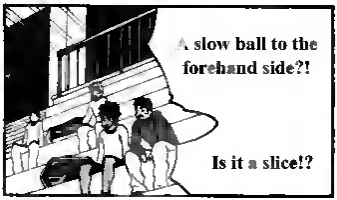
3 – 2.
Maruo
5 – 4
Maruo
EVEN THEN, BOTH OF THEM KEPT HOLDING THEIR SERVES, AND...
2 – 1
Alex

6 – 5 Alex
It's here...!
Alex finally has a match point!!
But if Maruo manages to keep his two serves, then he becomes the one who gets the match point
Their situation is tied.

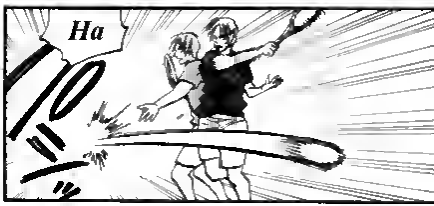
IN THIS LAST BATTLE IN AMERICA, WHERE I LEARNED THE VALUE OF WINNING,
THERE'S NO WAY I'LL LOSE!!
NO WAY I'LL LOSE AFTER GETTING THIS FAR.
Both of them must be nearing the end of their stamina
In this situation, it's either how well can Maruo maintain his control,
or how Alex can sustain his power
It all depends on their mental strength.
I'll end it here!!

!!


HA


A slow ball to the forehand side?!
Is it a slice!?

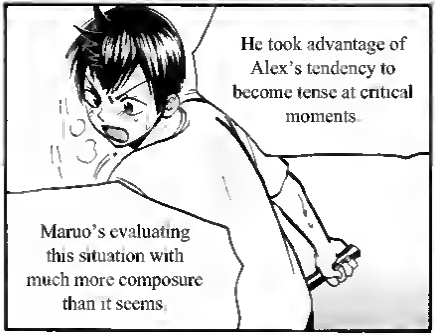
HE MISSED HIS TIMING!

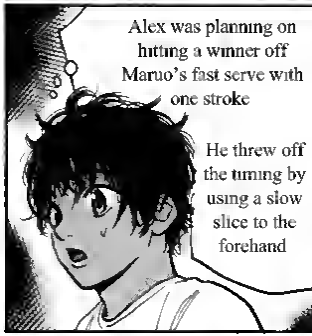

Ha

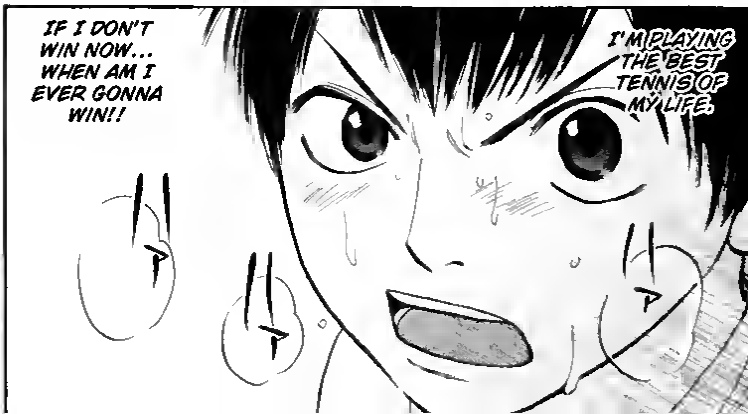
I CAN DO THIS!!

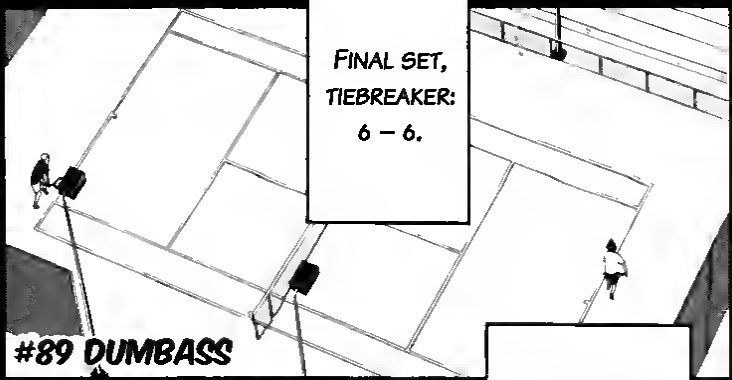
HA
WOW....!!
Amazing control !!

6 – 6
YES
He made it past the match point!!
Is this gonna keep on going?!

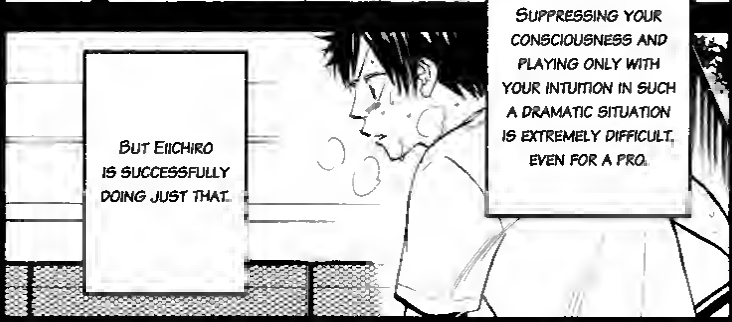

He took advantage of Alex's tendency to become tense at critical moments.
Maruo's evaluating this situation with much more composure than it seems.


Alex was planning on hitting a winner off Maruo's fast serve with one stroke
He threw off the timing by using a slow slice to the forehand


IF I DON'T WIN NOW... WHEN AM I EVER GONNA WIN!!
I'M PLAYING THE BEST TENNIS OF MY LIFE.

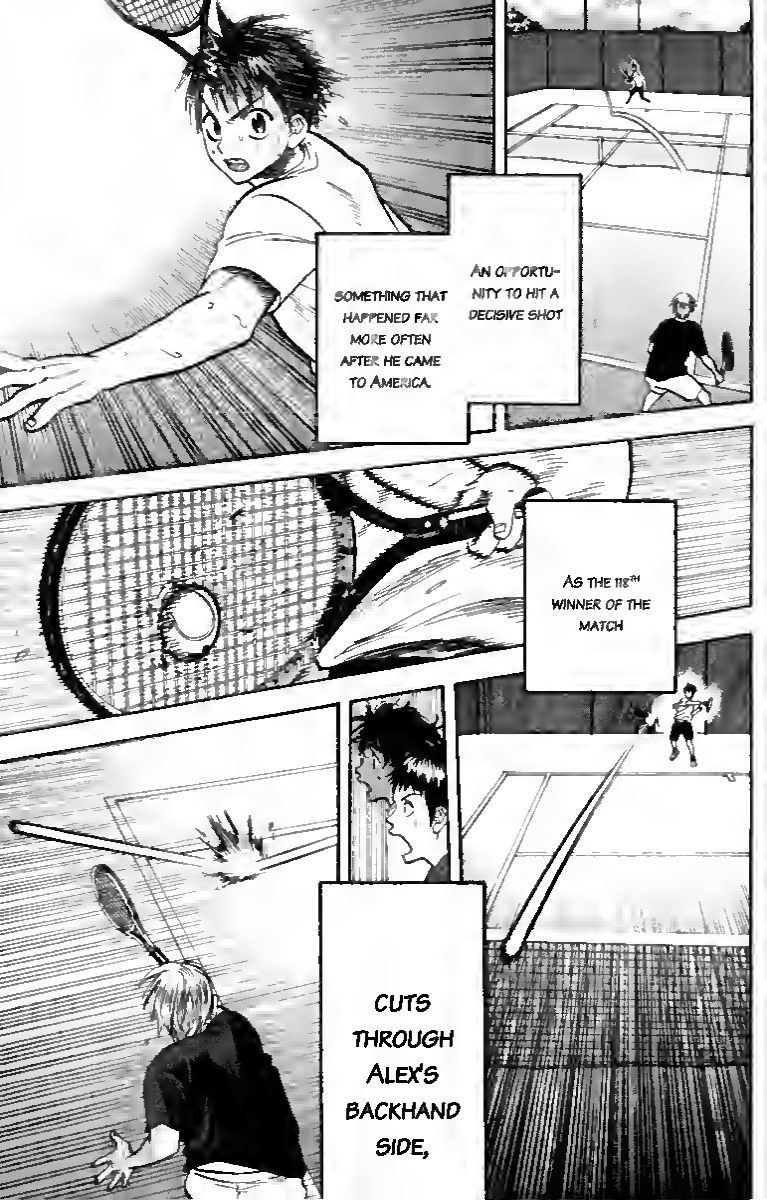

FINAL SET, TIEBREAKER: 6 — 6.

#89 DUMBASS


SUPPRESSING YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS AND PLAYING ONLY WITH YOUR INTUITION IN SUCH A DRAMATIC SITUATION IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, EVEN FOR A PRO.
BUT EIICHIRO IS SUCCESSFULLY DOING JUST THAT.

NEW INSIGHTS AFTER RUNNING OUT OF STRATEGIES IN THE SECOND SET.
THE FACT THAT HE'S CHALLENGING A PRO,
THINGS HE LEARNED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FLORIDA,
THE RECAP AND FORETHOUGHT HE METICULOUSLY DID TILL NOW,
HIS STRONG DESIRE TO WIN,
IT WAS UNCLEAR WHAT DROVE HIM TO THIS LEVEL, BUT

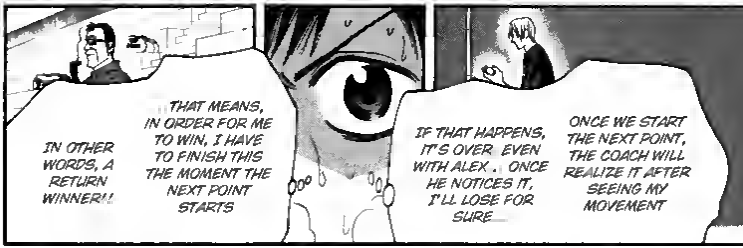
He understands very well that his intuition is making decisions with a solid strategic basis,
and that they're being executed with pinpoint control that couldn't normally be possible.
In the midst of this turbulent situation, there is a part of him that maintains a calm, composed state.
The day's best flat serve goes in on the wide side.
The difference from the slice serve just before
causes Alex to miss the timing

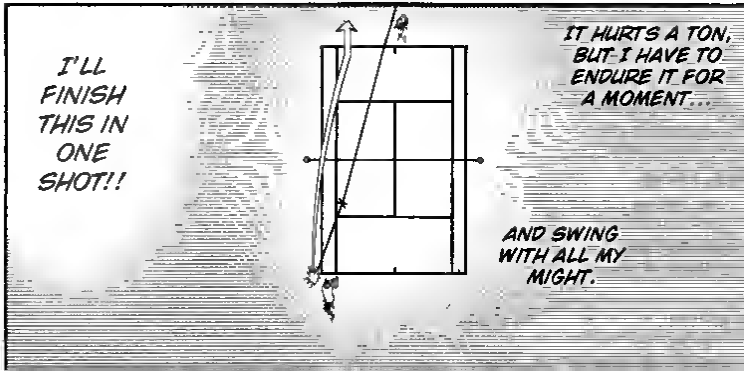

An opportunity to hit a decisive shot
something that happened far more often after he came to America.
As the 118th winner of the match
cuts through Alex's backhand side,

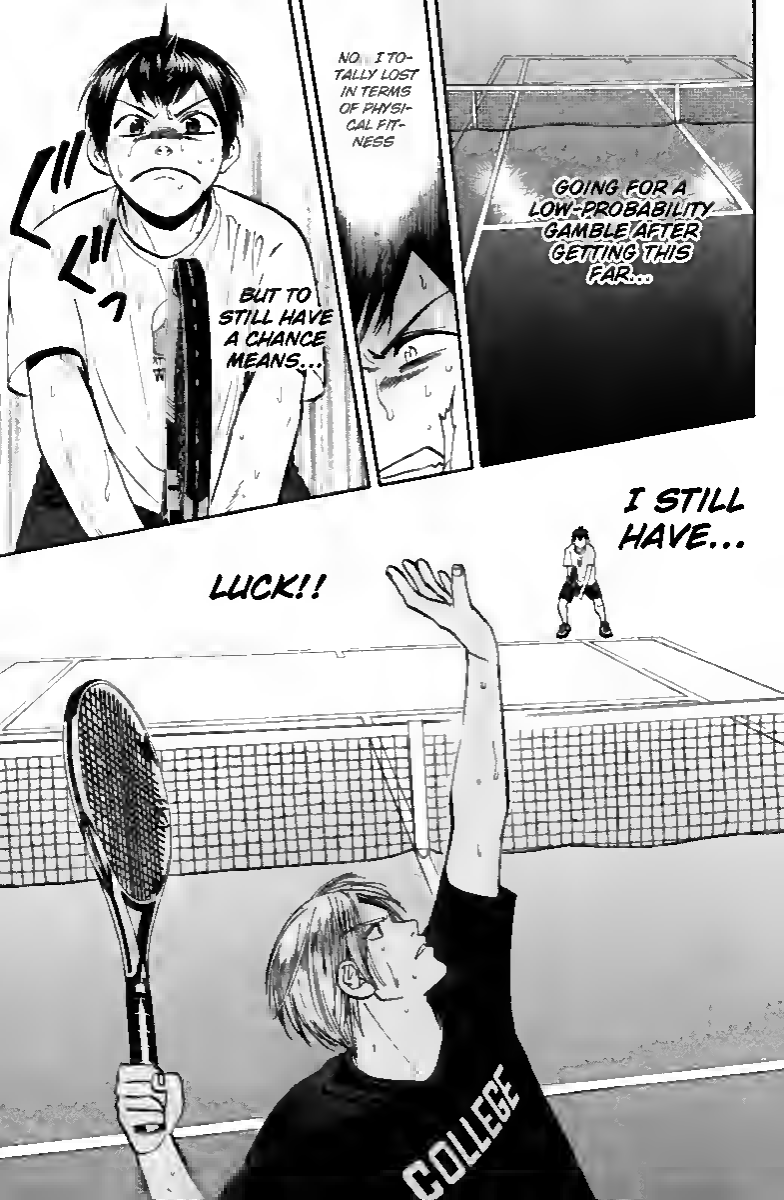
ヒロキッ
7 – 6
FINALLY UNLEASHES ITS SCREAM.
HIS RIGHT CALF THAT HAS BEEN UNDER CONSTANT STRESS
NO WAY... DID I... STRAIN IT?!
EH...?
This time, it's Maruo's match point!

I STRAINED IT!!
OUCH
WHAT AM I GONNA DO.... WHAT SHOULD I DO?
WAIT...WAIT... WAIT A SEC!?
BASED ON THE PAIN, IT'S NOT A TORN MUSCLE, LIGAMENT, OR BROKEN BONE. IT'S JUST A SIMPLE MUSCLE STRAIN.
BUT IF I TELL THIS TO THE COACH RIGHT NOW, HE'LL DEFINITELY STOP THE MATCH.

THINK...
WHAT SHOULD I DO!..
MORE LOGICALLY...
STOPPING AT MATCH POINT...
HECK NO!!

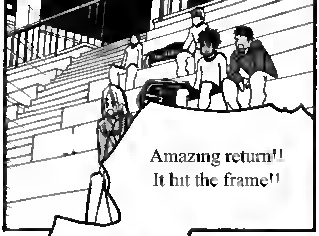

IN OTHER WORDS, A RETURN WINNER!!
THAT MEANS, IN ORDER FOR ME TO WIN, I HAVE TO FINISH THIS THE MOMENT THE NEXT POINT STARTS
IF THAT HAPPENS, IT'S OVER EVEN WITH ALEX.. ONCE HE NOTICES IT, I'LL LOSE FOR SURE...
ONCE WE START THE NEXT POINT, THE COACH WILL REALIZE IT AFTER SEEING MY MOVEMENT


I'LL FINISH THIS IN ONE SHOT!!
IT HURTS A TON, BUT I HAVE TO ENDURE IT FOR A MOMENT...
AND SWING WITH ALL MY MIGHT.


GOING FOR A LOW-PROBABILITY GAMBLE AFTER GETTING THIS FAR...
NO, I TOTALLY LOST IN TERMS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS
BUT TO STILL HAVE A CHANCE MEANS...
I STILL HAVE...
LUCK!!
COLLEGE

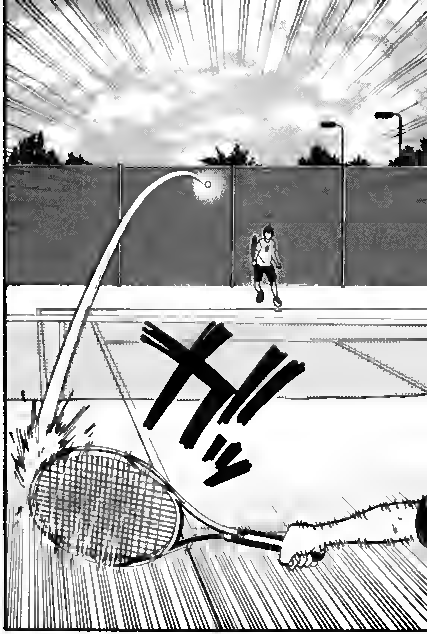
IT'S PROBABLY DOWN THE CENTER!!
COLLEGE
!!
HERE IT COMES!!
PLEASE...

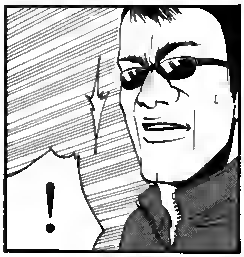
HA
MAKE THIS THE END!!


Amazing return!!
It hit the frame!!

It's coming back!!

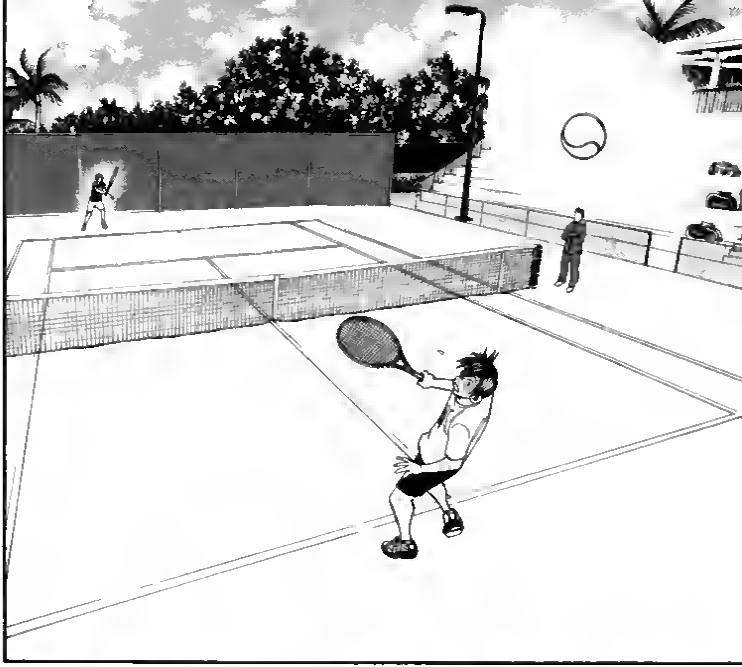
!?




!

Huh? What the ?! What's wrong with Maruo!?
Did he hurt his leg?!

ALEX
SHORT
WIDE
DEUCE COURT
IT'S EXPOSED.
ARGH
NOW, THERE'S ALMOST NO POSSIBILITY TO WIN.
BUT. MOVE UP SO I CAN HAVE EVEN SLIGHTLY BETTER ODDS!!
NIKE

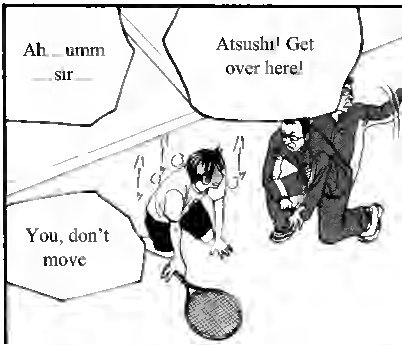


COLLEGE

O...OUT!!

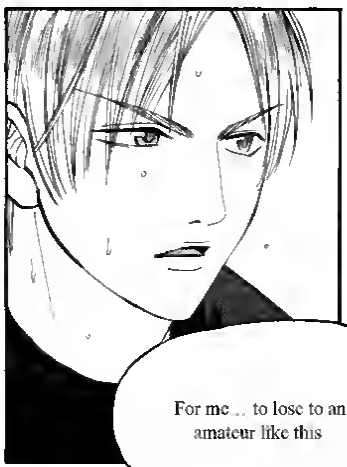
YOU DUMBASS!!

I... I'M FINE... IT'S JUST A STRAIN, SO I'M REALLY FINE


Ah... umm ...sir...
Atsushi! Get over here!
You, don't move

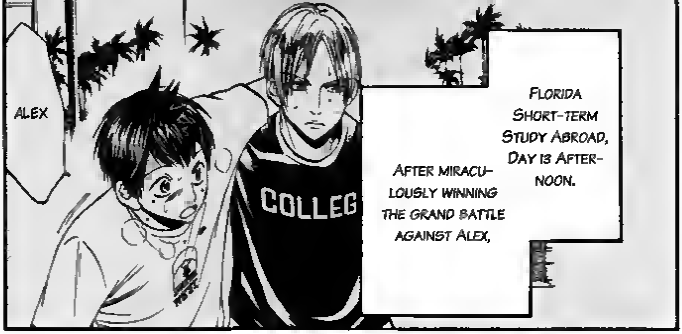
HE SAYS THAT'S THE COACH'S JOB TO DECIDE SO DON'T SAY ANY MORE NON-SENSE
ALSO, IF YOU HAVE A GOAL, DON'T DO ANYTHING RECKLESS LIKE THAT AGAIN.
I... I'M SORRY.
MY GOAL...
THE ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR...
A.. ANYWAY, LET'S GO TO THE MEDICAL CENTER.
YES
CAN YOU GET UP?
YES

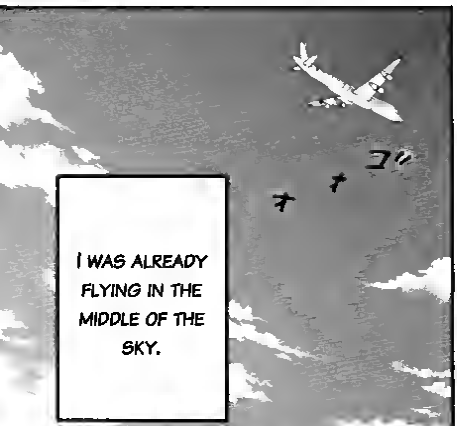
ALEX
COLLEGE

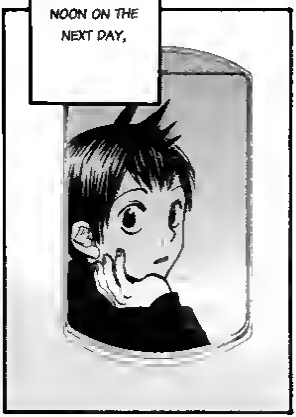

For me ... to lose to an amateur like this

BUT... I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE OR STOP THE MATCH IN THE MIDDLE.
SO...SORRY... UMM... THAT LAST ONE WAS REALLY A FLUKE...
IS... IS HE... MAD?
I definitely hesitated at the end.
But that's the result.
MY... WIN
It's just ...

these sort of matches should be done somewhere with a bigger audience.
E-…Eichiro! Alex…
Yup…
Hey, are you okay?
Alright, next Pedro and Krishna, get in.
Maruo Eiichiro
6—2 3—6 7—6 (8—6)
Alex


ALEX
COLLEG
FLORIDA SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD, DAY 13 AFTERNOON.
AFTER MIRACULOUSLY WINNING THE GRAND BATTLE AGAINST ALEX,

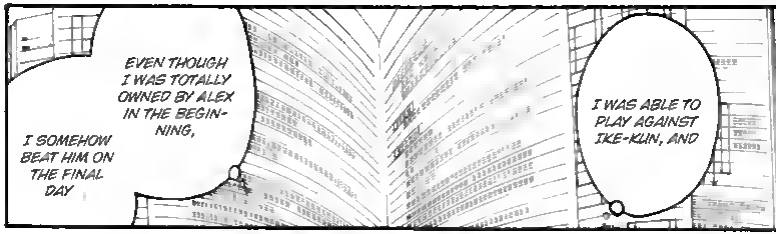




#90 RETURN HOME

IT WAS A VERY FRUITFUL TWO WEEKS
Caribbean notebook

All passengers aboard, thank you so much for choosing our airline for your trip


EVEN THOUGH I WAS TOTALLY OWNED BY ALEX IN THE BEGINNING,
I SOMEHOW BEAT HIM ON THE FINAL DAY
I WAS ABLE TO PLAY AGAINST IKE-KUN, AND

..ALTHOUGH EVEN IF I WON ACCORDING TO THE SCORE, IT WAS STILL PRETTY MUCH A MIRACLE

AND AT THE END, ALEX HESITATED.
トン
IT'S NOT REALLY AN OUTCOME I CAN TAKE PRIDE IN.
I definitely hesitated at the end
But that's the result
MY CONSCIOUS AND INTUITION WERE WORKING TOGETHER SURPRISINGLY WELL.
NOT ONLY DID I HAVE TWO WEEKS WORTH OF DATA,
IT'LL BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO RE-ENTER THAT STATE EVEN IF I TRY.
IF YOU MANAGED TO WIN IN THE END, THEN JUST
OF IT
なっ
ゴゥ
ォ
ォ
SINCE I WON, I HAVE TO KEEP IT GOING
YEAH ANYWAY, I WON!
テニス 43

A FEW HOURS EARLIER...
YOU DIDN'T FORGET ANYTHING, RIGHT?
I... I DON'T THINK SO.
UMM...
Everyone, thank you very much for the past two weeks!!

IF YOU EVER COME HERE AGAIN, DON'T FORGET TO CALL ME.

NO PROBLEM. WE'RE FELLOW COUNTRYMEN.
ESPECIALLY ATSUSHI-SAN, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR HELP.

But I'm so glad I met you, Maruo
It was really interesting, and a lot of fun
Although I was a bit worried at first
INTER-ESTING?

Too bad~~~ I wanted to play against you one more time

ムスー
RGH

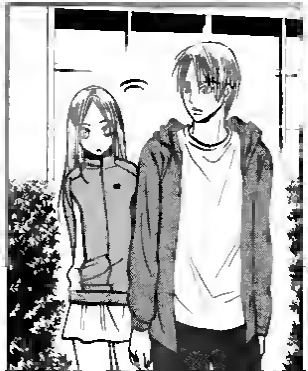
Hey, Alex.

THEN WHAT WAS WITH THAT SMILE YESTERDAY.

Would I have won if that last shot wasn't a lob? ...But it was the appropriate shot if I think about Maruo's condition...
YESTERDAY'S LOSS IS FINALLY STARTING TO GET TO HIM.

Anyway...

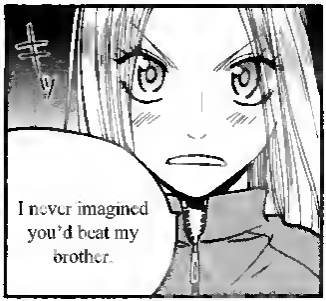
That was a great match that I'll never forget for the rest of my life
I definitely plan on paying you back someday in a real match



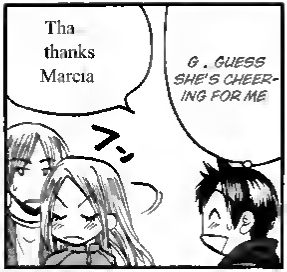
ALEX...
That's a quick mood swing.

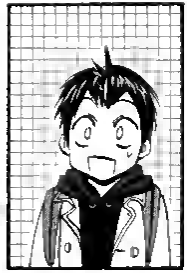
But since you won, you better become a pro, okay?
I'll become one too!!

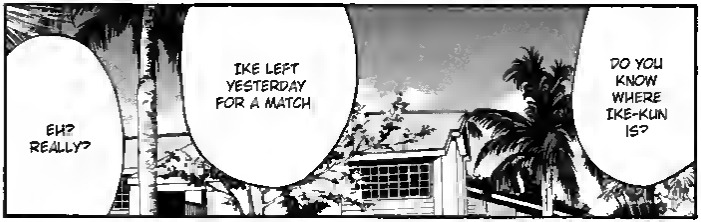
Thank you Marcia
MARCIA HELPED ME WITH A LOT OF THINGS TOO.


I never imagined you'd beat my brother.

AH, MIKE.
ARE YOU DONE, EI-CHAN?


Tha thanks Marcia
G . GUESS SHE'S CHEERING FOR ME

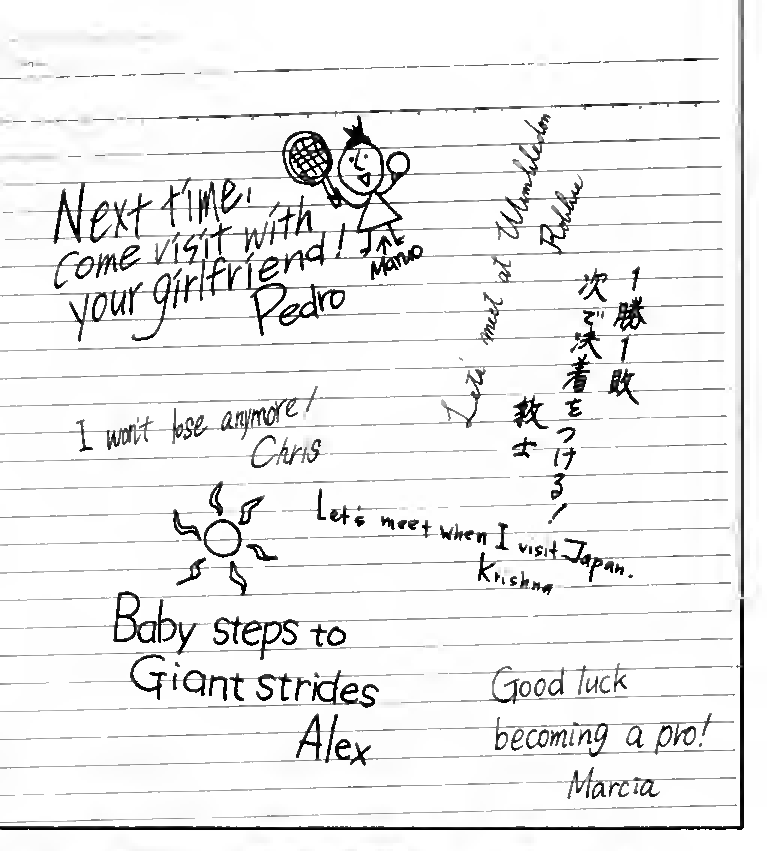



EH? REALLY?
IKE LEFT YESTERDAY FOR A MATCH
DO YOU KNOW WHERE IKE-KUN IS?

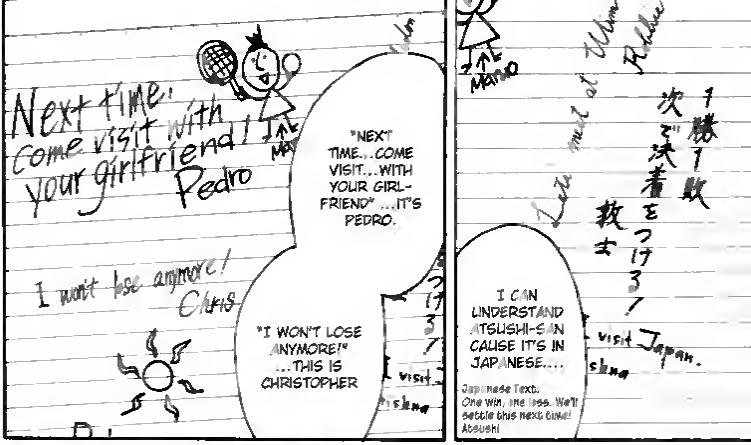
BUT... WHY NACCHAN?
?
WHO KNOWS.
AH... THAT'S RIGHT, I FORGOT THAT SOUJI LEFT A MESSAGE SAYING:
"GIVE YOUR THANKS TO NATSU"
Oops
EH
I'll play only against the people who can beat Marsu!
IT'S ALL THANKS TO IKE-KUN THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO PLAY SO MANY MATCHES
...me!?
SO I WANTED TO SAY THANKS TO HIM AT LEAST ONE...
I BROUGHT A CAMERA,
SO PLEASE TAKE A PICTURE.
OKAY, I JUST PRESS THIS, RIGHT?
AH... WAIT.
PLEASE WAIT A LITTLE BIT MORE.
EI-CHAN, IF WE DON'T GET GOING, WE'LL BE LATE FOR THE FLIGHT.
You too, Marcia.
Here, here
A photo
Then here we go,
Everyone, squeeze in a bit more
OKAY!

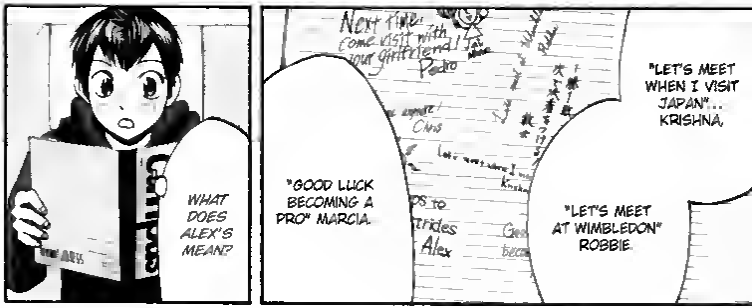
Bye bye everyone.
See you again !
THANK YOU, MIKE!
ALRIGHT, LET'S GO EI-CHAN CAN'T STAY HERE FOR-EVER
OKAY.
Well, then
See ya
Take care~
GOOD LUCK!

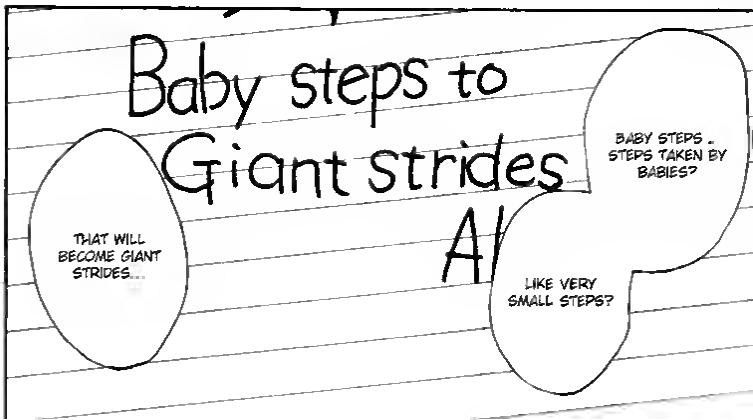
I BETTER THANK COACH AOI AND DAD.
BUT... I'M SO GLAD I WENT
HMM?


Next time, come visit with your girlfriend! ↑ Manuo
Pedro
I won't lose anymore!
Chris
Let's meet at Wimbledon
Roddick
1勝1敗
次で決着をつける!
救世
Let's meet when I visit Japan.
Krishna
Baby steps to Giant strides
Alex
Good luck becoming a pro!
Marcia

WHEN DID THEY...
WHA... WHAT IS THIS?
テニス A3

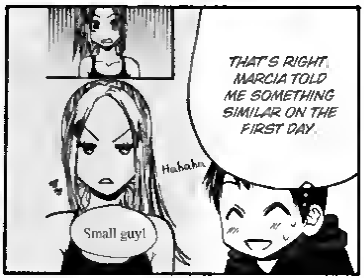

Next time, come visit with your girlfriend! Pedro
I won't lose anymore! Chris
"NEXT" TIME...COME VISIT...WITH YOUR GIRL-FRIEND" ...IT'S PEDRO.
"I WON'T LOSE ANYMORE!" ...THIS IS CHRISTOPHER
1勝1敗
次で決着をつける!
I CAN UNDERSTAND ATSUSHI-SAN CAUSE IT'S IN JAPANESE....
Japanese Text: One win, one loss. We'll settle this next time! Atsushi
visit Japan.


WHAT DOES ALEX'S MEAN?
"GOOD LUCK BECOMING A PRO" MARCIA.
"LET'S MEET WHEN I VISIT JAPAN"... KRISHNA.
"LET'S MEET AT WIMBLEDON" ROBBIE.


Baby steps to Giant strides
THAT WILL BECOME GIANT STRIDES...
BABY STEPS . STEPS TAKEN BY BABIES?
LIKE VERY SMALL STEPS?

FOR ME, I'D RATHER GO WITH A GIANT STRIDE FROM THE VERY START...
IT'S LIKE TINY STEPS WILL EVENTUALLY ACCUMULATE TO GIANT STRIDES...

...
テニス43

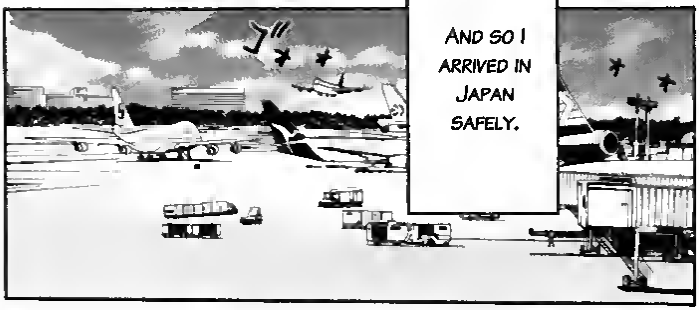

THAT'S RIGHT. MARCIA TOLD ME SOMETHING SIMILAR ON THE FIRST DAY.
Hahahn
Small guy!

IF I WORK HARD, I'LL BE ABLE TO MEET THEM AGAIN. EVENTUALLY.

WHA WHAT THE!?

IF I KEEP ON PLAYING TENNIS.
BUT IT'S OKAY... I'LL MEET THEM AGAIN

SO WORK HARD, EVERYONE.
I'LL WORK HARD TOO.


AND SO I ARRIVED IN JAPAN SAFELY.

HOW WAS IT OVER THERE?
GEEZ, YOU DIDN'T EVEN GIVE US A CALL.
WELCOME BACK! YOU LOOK FINE
AH... I'LL TELL YOU ALL ABOUT IT LATER
DID YOU EVER GET SICK OR ANYTHING?

MOM.
EIICHIRO!

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I FELT SAFE, BUT I WAS SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED,

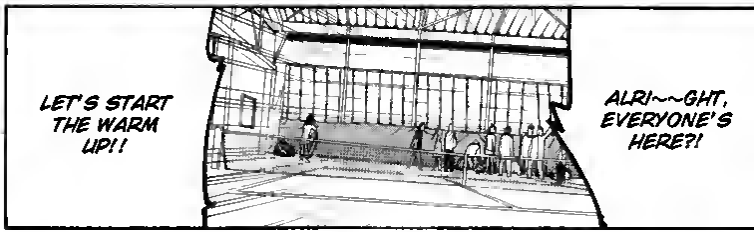
ONCE I CAME BACK HOME,
I'M HOME~

SO I JUST RELAXED THE ENTIRE DAY.

TWO DAYS LATER, STC.
AH, EI-CHAN!
WELCOME BACK.
I'M BACK.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE, ANIKI!!
WAS IT FUN?
HOW WAS FLORIDA?
IT'S ALL JAPANESE.

I WON'T LOOK ANY DIFFERENT IN JUST TWO WEEKS!!
YOU HAVEN'T REALLY CHANGED
EH!?
WHA... WHAT!?
AH, COACH AOI.
HMMM, NICE WORDS
YOU MEAN THE OUTSIDE DIDN'T CHANGE, BUT THE INSIDE HAS .. HUH?
Long-time no see
YOU BETTER HAVE COME BACK STRONGER
AH~ I DON'T CARE ABOUT THINGS LIKE GRATITUDE AND STUFF, SO
THANKS TO COACH AOI, I WAS ABLE TO HAVE A GREAT EXPERIENCE

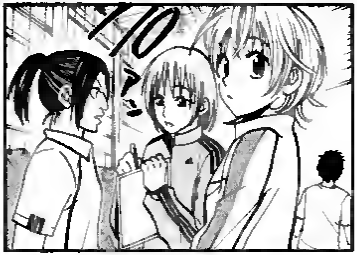
...YES.


LET'S START THE WARM UP!!
ALRI~~GHT, EVERYONE'S HERE?!

YES SIR!

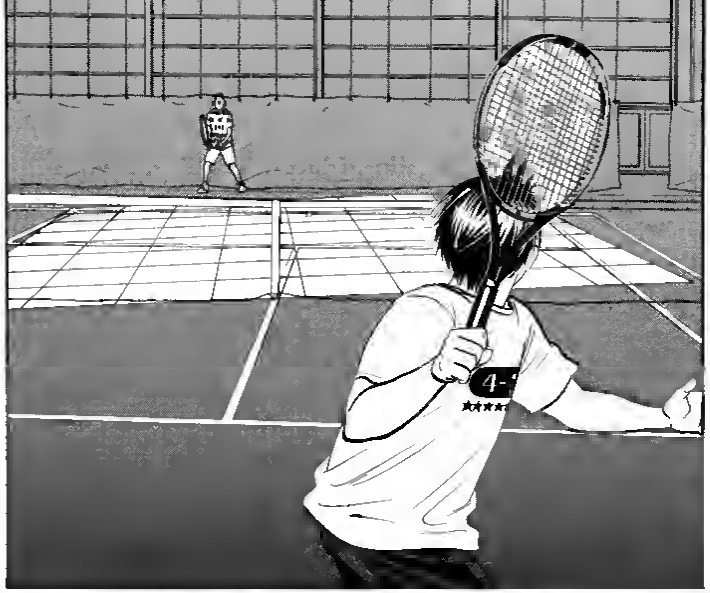
FIRST DAY OF PRACTICE AT STC SINCE RETURNING HOME.
#91 ADVANCE

HIS SHOTS GOT HEAVIER



YEAH!

4-25
★★★★★★★
I'VE GAINED MUCH MORE THAN I REALIZED!!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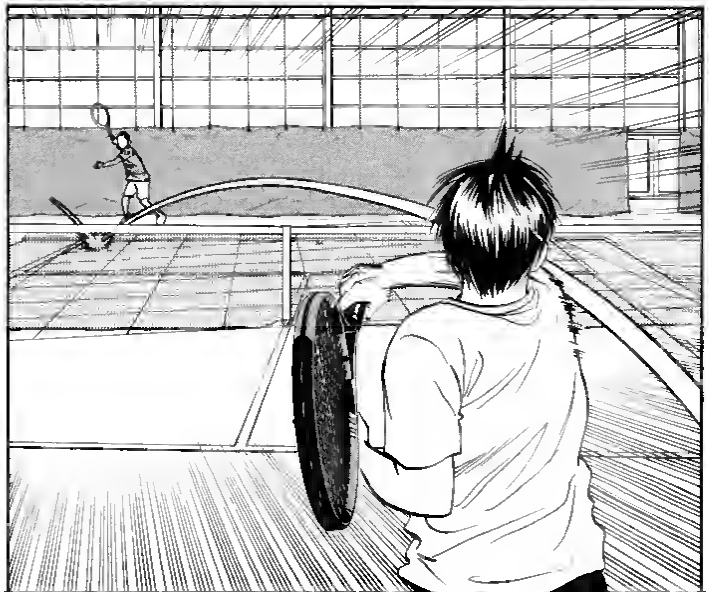
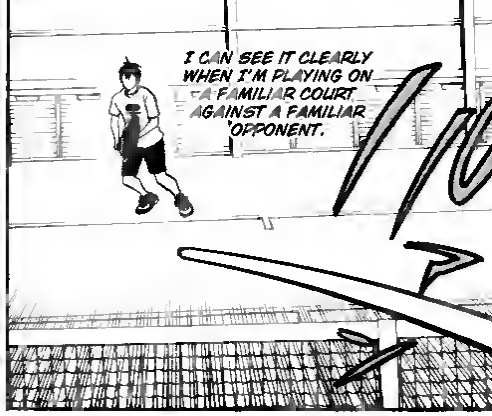
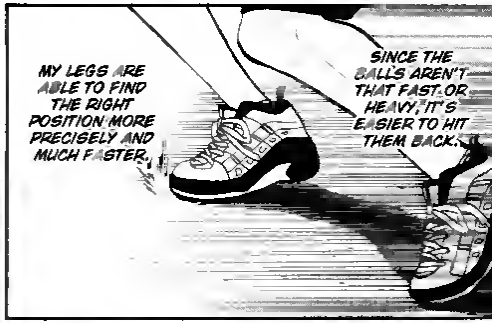



I CAN SEE IT CLEARLY WHEN I'M PLAYING ON A FAMILIAR COURT AGAINST A FAMILIAR OPPONENT.


MY LEGS ARE ABLE TO FIND THE RIGHT POSITION MORE PRECISELY AND MUCH FASTER.
SINCE THE BALLS AREN'T THAT FAST OR HEAVY, IT'S EASIER TO HIT THEM BACK.

THINGS I COULDN'T SEE BECAUSE I WAS AT A DIFFERENT PLACE,
CAN BE SEEN HERE.

DIADORA
ALTHOUGH IT WAS SORT OF A GAMBLE.
IT'S GOOD THAT WE SENT HIM RIGHT?
YOU'RE RIGHT.
IT'S PROOF THAT HE CAME BACK WITH MUCH MORE CONFIDENCE
HA
HE'S RID HIMSELF OF UNNECESSARY MOVEMENTS, AND HIS FORM GOT SMOOTHER.
BUT IN ALL HONESTY, IT'LL STILL BE QUITE TOUGH TO WIN THE ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR.
I KNOW THAT.
THE TYPE OF SHOCK YOU GET FROM SEEING THE WORLD VARIES DEPENDING ON THE PERSON
THAT'S WHY THERE ARE A LOT OF CASES OF LETTING PRO-CANDIDATE KIDS HAVE OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG AND HAVE HIGH ADAPT-ABILITY
HE DID WELL IN THAT SENSE TOO

IF YOU THINK OF IT NORMALLY, IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.
THAT'S WHY I CALLED YOU.
I'LL DO AS MUCH AS I CAN.
...THERE-FORE,

OCT. ~~ITC CUP KANAGAWA COMPETITION~~
NOV. ~~ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR INDOOR SELECTIONALS KANT~~
JAN. ~~ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR INDOOR SELECTIONALS~~
MAR. KANAGAWA JUNIOR TENNIS COMPETITION
JUL. KANTOU JUNIOR TENNIS COMPETITION
AUG ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR TENNIS COMPETITION.
TWO MONTHS GO BY IN NO TIME.
ARG...
YEAH!
STARTING TOMORRIOW, YUKICHI, YOUR PRACTICE AND FITNESS SCHEDULES WILL BE EVEN MORE INTENSE.
FOR MARUO-KUN, WE'LL INTENSIFY THE BODY TRANSFORMATION SCHEDULE AND WORK ON THE OFFENSIVE CONTROL YOU LEARNED IN FLORIDA.
I'LL ALSO BE ADDING OTHER SPECIAL TRAINING ON TOP OF THAT, SO KEEP THAT IN MIND
YES!!
WE CAN'T WASTE EVEN A SECOND, GOT IT!!

THE MUST-WIN BATTLES ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN...!!
IN ORDER TO BE A PRO...

SEE YA TOMORROW~
GOOD WORK~
SEE YA~

SORRY FOR MAKING YOU WAIT!
BYE COACH AOI~
HEY
OHH~ SOUNDS GOOD! STAY THERE FOR LIKE 3 YEARS.
AH~ MAYBE I SHOULD GO TO AMERICA TOO~

YEAH
SHALL WE GO THEN?
GOOD WORK, NACCHAN
GOOD WORK SIR~
THEN BYE~
BE CAREFUL OKAY?
It's cold
WANNA TAKE THE BUS?
EH~? LET'S WALK I WANNA HEAR ABOUT FLORIDA, TOO

YOU SURE GOT BETTER EI-CHAN.
REALLY? THANKS.
REALLY, I'M SO GLAD.
I CAN'T HELP SMILING!
BE.. BECAUSE IT'S BEEN A WHILE,
?

THAT'S RIGHT . HERE'S A PHOTO
HEY, SO
TELL ME MORE ABOUT FLORIDA

TOWARDS THE END I SOME-HOW MANAGED TO COMMUNICATE BY MYSELF A BIT
THIS IS ATSUSHI-SAN, WHO HELPED ME A LOT SINCE HE'S JAPANESE
MY ENGLISH STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO, THOUGH

WOW .. THERE'S SOMEONE REALLY GOOD LOOKING!
YOU MEAN ALEX? THE ONE NEXT TO HIM IS HIS SISTER, MARCIA
SIBLINGS HUH~ THEY DO LOOK ALIKE
THEY HAVE SIMILAR PER-SONALITIES TOO

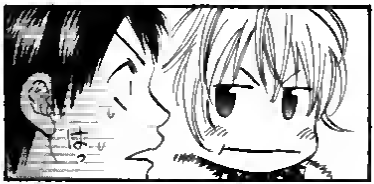
I HAD TROUBLE WINNING CAUSE I PICKED UP A LOSING HABIT
WELL, IT WASN'T JUST FULL OF FUN STUFF.

HAHA
A ha ha ha ha ha
HMMM... BUT I'M GLAD.
WE WERE ALL WORRIED WHETHER EI-CHAN WOULD BE ABLE TO FIT IN PROPERLY.
WE WERE AFRAID YOU'D HAVE TROUBLE CAUSE YOU'RE TOO NAIVE.

I SEE... WELL, YOU AREN'T REALLY A TYPE TO THINK ABOUT THINGS DEEPLY

LOSING HABIT? WHAT'S THAT?
EH?
NACCHAN, YOU'VE NEVER HAD ONE?

I WAS JUST THINKING THAT "NOT OVER-THINKING" WOULD ALSO BE A SOLUTION,
SO I THOUGHT IT'D BE PRETTY AMAZING.



I DO HAVE DEEP THOUGHTS TOO YOU KNOW!
N...NO THAT'S NOT... I DIDN'T MEAN IT THAT WAY

AH

HMM, WELL IT'S NO BIG DEAL
SO?

YOU HELPED ME IN SOME WAY THROUGH IKE-KUN, RIGHT?
SORRY... I DIDN'T REALLY GET WHAT IT MEANT, BUT
EH...
THAT'S RIGHT, IKE-KUN SAID
"GIVE YOUR THANKS TO NATSU"
.....?
AHHHHH
U~M...
YOU DIDN'T ASK IKE-KUN TO DO SOMETHING?
EH? TELL ME.
EH!?
I WONDER WHAT THAT'S ABOUT

I FORGOT ABOUT IT ALREADY.
YOU DEFINITELY REMEMBER IT!
IT... IT'S BUGGING ME.
IT'S FINE IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TELL ME,
BUT THANKS TO THAT, I WAS ABLE TO HAVE A GREAT EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA, SO
THANK YOU.
YUP.

BUT HE REALLY IS COOL.
NOT JUST WELL, HE TOTALLY DESTROYED ME.
HOW WAS SOU-CHAN? WAS HE DOING WELL?
HE'S TOTALLY DIFFERENT EVEN THOUGH WE'RE BOTH JAPANESE AND ARE THE SAME AGE.
NOT JUST AS A PLAYER, BUT ALSO A HUMAN, HE FEELS LIKE A MUCH BIGGER PERSON.
EVEN THOUGH HE'S IN THE HARSH PROFESSIONAL WORLD, HE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE HAVING FUN.
Ahahaha
YOU BELIEVED IT FOR A BIT, RIGHT?
RGH
HOW ARE THINGS WITH NATSUI?
ME? SOU-CHAN'S?
EH... UMMM... YOU SEE HE SAID STUFF LIKE NACCHAN IS HIS FIANCE...
ALTHOUGH I'M HER FIANCE TOO
WHA... WHAT DID HE DO?
BUT HE LIKES TO TEASE PEOPLE, DOESN'T HE?

EH... EHHH!?
WELL IT'S NOT TOTALLY A LIE.
IT'S NOT THAT COMMON
IT'S PRETTY COMMON
"I'LL BE SOU-CHAN'S BRIDE WHEN I GROW UP----!" STUFF LIKE THAT
OF COURSE, IT'S FROM WHEN WE WERE LITTLE
MY MOM STILL TEASES ME ABOUT THAT EVEN NOW
I SAID STUFF LIKE THAT A LOT WITHOUT EVEN REALLY KNOWING THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE
SOU-CHAN WAS MY CLOSEST GUY FRIEND, SO

ABOUT THE TIME SOU-CHAN DECIDED TO GO TO AMERICA, I SORT OF REALIZED IT
THAT IT FEELS MUCH MORE LIKE FRIENDSHIP THAN LOVE
EVEN IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, HE WAS MY CLOSEST FRIEND
...
SO AT ONE POINT I REALLY DID THINK IT'D REALLY END UP HAPPENING EVENTUALLY, BUT
MIDDLE SCHOOL IS PRETTY RECENT.
HMMM
...

EH...
ARE... ARE YOU... FEELING JEALOUS?
OF... OF COURSE!!
I AM JEALOUS!

AH...
ビキ
ビキ
ビキ
Ahaha
AH...
IS THAT SO

N...
NACCHAN
...
ドキ
ドキ
I'VE... WANTED TO SAY SOMETHING FOR QUITE A WHILE, BUT
...I
REALLY THINK I...
EH
AH...
UMM

L-...

...-EARN A LOT WHEN I'M WITH YOU.

LO-... LONG TIME NO SEE.
TA... TAKUMA-SAN.
HEAD
HEAD
Y... YEAH
LE- LET'S GO

AHHHHHHH
AHHHHHHH...
AND HITTING IT RIGHT INTO THE NET...
IT... IT FEELS LIKE GETTING A "I GOTTA FINISH THIS RIGHT NOW!" TYPE OF BALL,
DON'T RUSH!
RUSHING DOESN'T HELP...
I PROBABLY ADVANCED A STEP... NO AT LEAST HALF A STEP FORWARD.
NO! I TRIED HARD!

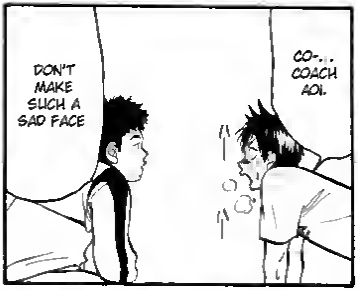
DON'T FALL BACK TILL THE VERY END!
JUMP & DASH!!
ONLY TWO MONTHS LEFT TILL THE KANAGAWA JUNIOR, THE QUALIFIER FOR MY GOAL, THE ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR.

#92 STEP

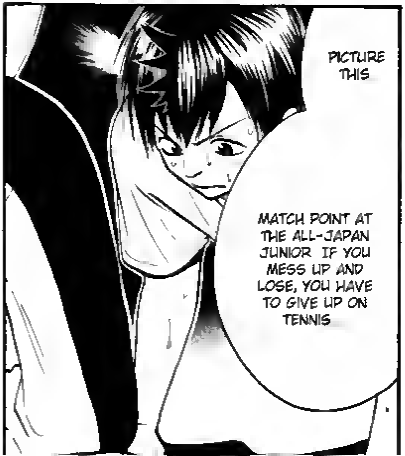
HA
ARGH...

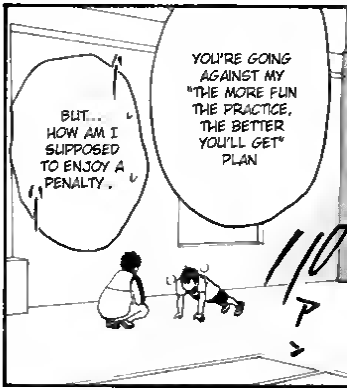
HAA
OUT!
20 PUSH
UPS!
ドッ

9...
10...
...11


DON'T MAKE SUCH A SAD FACE
CO-... COACH AOI.

HEY~ WHY DONTCHA ENJOY YOURSELF A BIT MORE?

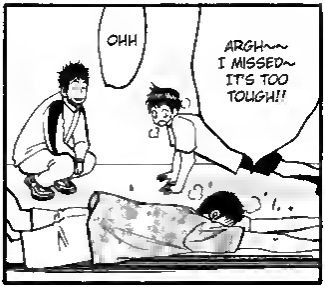

PICTURE THIS
MATCH POINT AT THE ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR IF YOU MESS UP AND LOSE, YOU HAVE TO GIVE UP ON TENNIS


YOU'RE GOING AGAINST MY "THE MORE FUN THE PRACTICE, THE BETTER YOU'LL GET" PLAN
BUT... HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO ENJOY A PENALTY.

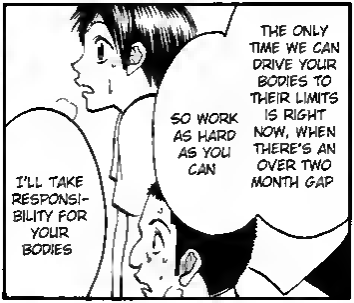
YOU GOTTA BE ABLE TO ENJOY PLAYING EVEN UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS, SO
I'D LIKE YOU TO ENDURE THIS SORT OF PENALTY WITH A SMILE.
A SMILE... SIR?
YUP.
C'MON, SMILE! STEP IT UP!
GO!!
SMILE!?
ニ…ニコ
プル
プル
...WELL, I GUESS THAT'S ASKING A BIT MUCH
BUT YOU GET THE POINT, RIGHT? YOU CAN COME UP WITH YOUR OWN WAY OF ENJOYING YOURSELF

FOR EXAMPLE, YOU'RE USING CONTROL AS YOUR WEAPON, RIGHT?
THEN YOU'LL FREQUENTLY HAVE TO GAUGE HOW MUCH RISK YOU CAN TAKE AT A CRUCIAL MOMENT, WON'T YOU?
WHETHER YOU CAN MAN UP AND AIM FOR THE LINE,
OR CHICKEN OUT AND MAKE A MISTAKE.
ENJOY THE THRILL OF EACH INDIVIDUAL POINT A BIT MORE
.....
...YES SIR!
ARICA
DONATION

I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU GUYS ARE HAVING A ROUGH TIME
BUT THAT'S OKAY FOR NOW.


OHH
ARGH~~ I MISSED~ IT'S TOO TOUGH!!

IF IT'S DANGEROUS, I'LL STOP YOU.


I'LL TAKE RESPONSI-BILITY FOR YOUR BODIES
SO WORK AS HARD AS YOU CAN
THE ONLY TIME WE CAN DRIVE YOUR BODIES TO THEIR LIMITS IS RIGHT NOW, WHEN THERE'S AN OVER TWO MONTH GAP

ALRIGHT~
HE'S SOME-HOW QUITE PERSUASIVE.

OKA~Y

THIS PERSON GOOFS AROUND SOME-TIMES, BUT

BYE GUYS~ I'M HEADING OUT EARLY
HUH? YOU'RE DONE ALREADY NACCHAN?
YUP THE NATIONAL SELECTION IS COMING UP
THE NEXT STAGE OF THE COMPETITION WE LOST IN KANTOU IS ABOUT TO START
Good work~
GOOD LUCK YOU TWO.

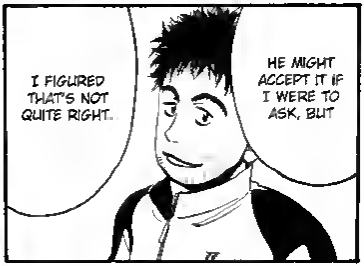
ALRIGHT. THIS AFTERNOON IS A PRACTICE MATCH.
THE TWO LOSERS FROM KANTOU BETTER PLAY AS IF IT'S THE NATIONALS!!
OF COURSE, THE LOSER WILL HAVE A PENALTY.
COURT A: YUKICHI, ITOU
COURT B: SATAKE, NODA
COURT C: SASAKI, OKUYAMA
HUH?
UMM... I WASN'T CALLED...
YEAH, YOU'LL HAVE TO START WITH REQUESTING A MATCH FROM YOUR OPPONENT.
HUH?
AGAINST HIM.

TA, TAKUMA-SAN, SIR?
YUP.

BUT DO YOU PLAN ON GIVING UP AFTER HEARING THAT?

BUT LAST TIME, HE FLAT OUT REJECTED ME.
Said it's annoying.
YEAH I HEARD FROM COACH MIURA
NO WAY

...


I FIGURED THAT'S NOT QUITE RIGHT.
HE MIGHT ACCEPT IT IF I WERE TO ASK, BUT

TAKUMA IS THE BEST OPPONENT FOR YOU RIGHT NOW.
YUP YUP.
I'LL...I'LL TRY ONCE MORE!!
OH... MARUO-KUN?
HUH?
GET OVER HERE.
OH GOOD. I HAVE SOMETHING TO ASK YOU TOO.
UMM.. EXCUSE ME, BUT I WANT TO TALK TO TAKUMA-SAN.

STC

……
屋内コート

BUT... I GOTTA GET HIM TO ACCEPT A MATCH SOMEHOW...

IT'S... IT'S A BIT AWKWARD.

HEY YOU...

YOU STILL HAVEN'T CONFESSED TO NATSU?
ゴホ
ゴホ
S-SO YOU WERE LISTENING YESTERDAY?
FIRST OF ALL, THAT WAS A COINCIDENCE OKAY?
I... I SEE
SO, WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?
HUH?
...WELL UMM... YOU SEE...
ビクッ
ビクッ
NOT... NOT YET

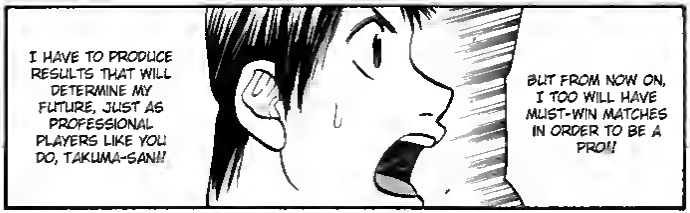
THEN SEE YA
AH... WAIT... I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO ASK YOU TOO...

TALKING ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH TAKUMA-SAN...
PERHAPS THAT WAS THE THING YOU WANTED TO ASK?
WELL YEAH.

PLAY A MATCH WITH ME!!
...UMM.. PLEASE...

スタスタ
IGNORED?!

WHEN I THINK BACK, I WAS ASKING ON A WHIM LAST TIME, SO IT WAS RIGHT FOR ME TO GET REJECTED.
UMM... CAN YOU PLEASE SAY YES THIS TIME?


I HAVE TO PRODUCE RESULTS THAT WILL DETERMINE MY FUTURE, JUST AS PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS LIKE YOU DO, TAKUMA-SAN!!
BUT FROM NOW ON, I TOO WILL HAVE MUST-WIN MATCHES IN ORDER TO BE A PRO!!

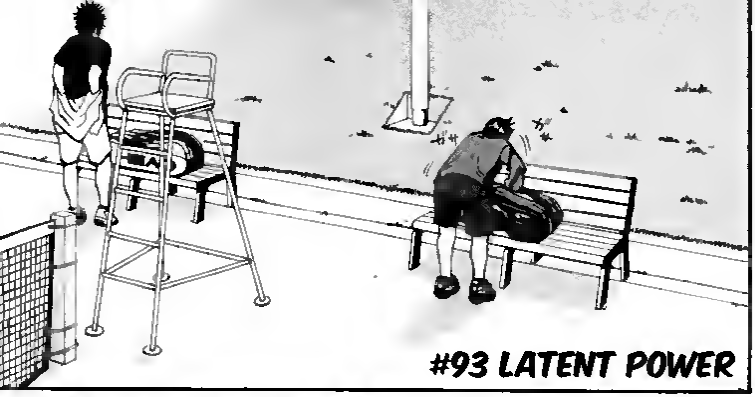
.....
SO PLEASE, PLAY A MATCH WITH ME!!
THEN HERE'S A QUESTION...

DO YOU THINK YOU CAN BEAT ME IF YOU WERE TO PLAY ME RIGHT NOW?
I DON'T KNOW.

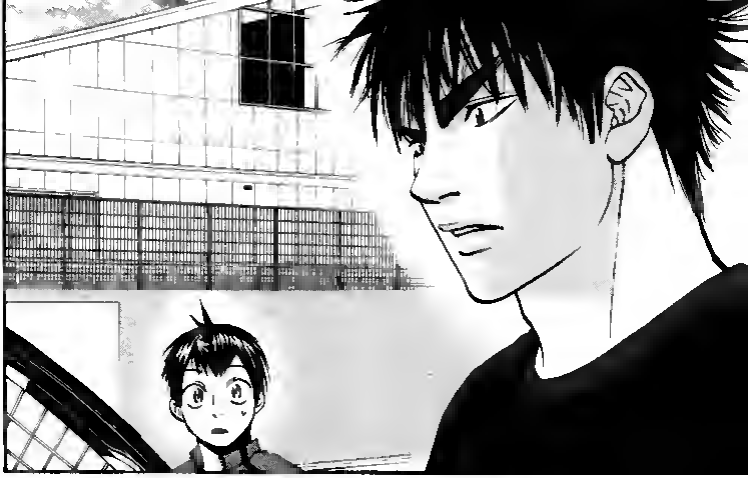
BUT
I BELIEVE I CAN'T BECOME A PRO IF I DON'T GET GOOD ENOUGH TO BEAT TAKUMA-SAN.
THEN I'LL PLAY YOU.
WELL, I TOO FEEL LIKE
EH...?! FOR REAL?
I SEE..

TEARING YOU TO PIECES RIGHT NOW.

SEE YA AT COURT NO.1 IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.


#93 LATENT POWER

MAYBE IT'S ABOUT YESTERDAY...
HE'S REALLY MAD FOR SOME REASON.
TAKUMA-SAN AGREED TO PLAY ME, BUT
チラッ
もやもや
I'VE WONDERED ABOUT IT FOR SOME TIME,
BUT TAKUMA-SAN MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE FEELINGS FOR NA-...



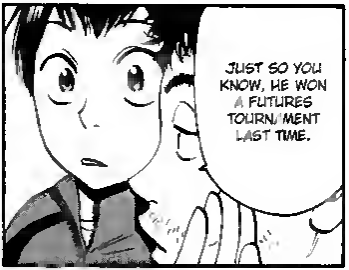
I FINALLY GET TO PLAY TAKUMA-SAN.
FOCUS...
BUT THAT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THE MATCH, RIGHT?

WHO... WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
GO AHEAD AND ANNIHILATE HIM.
.....

OH, NO PROBLEM AOI-SAN.
YO~ TAKUMA, SORRY FOR THE BOTHER, BUT THANKS

HE'S INCREDIBLE RIGHT NOW.
HE'S GONNA REACH THE TOP 500 IN THE WORLD RANKINGS IN NO TIME AT THIS RATE.

EH? W-...WELL I MANAGED SOMEHOW..
HMMM... GOOD JOB PERSUADING HIM.


JUST SO YOU KNOW, HE WON A FUTURES TOURNAMENT LAST TIME.

HE... HE WON ONE ALREADY?!
FUTURES?... A PROFESSIONAL COMPETITION!!

WHICH SIDE?

EVEN ALEX WAS BARELY IN THE TOP 1000 ..

IT'S DOWN.
MY SERVE.
HEAD
I'LL TAKE UP.
THREE SET MATCH. EGAWA SERVES FIRST!
I UNDERWENT BODY TRANSFORMATION,
AND WON AGAINST ALEX.
THE 9-PARTITION CONTROL I WAS USING BACK THEN IS NOW UP TO 64.
ONE YEAR AGO, HE WAS AN OPPONENT BEYOND MY COMPREHENSION, BUT...
I CAN'T SAY THAT ANYMORE

I'VE GROWN TOO.
SO BELIEVE IN MYSELF AND...
FOCUS ON MY INSTINCTS TO...
HUNIMALS

15-LOVE
WHA...

ドッ
RGH
カル
30-LOVE
WHAT THE HECK IS THIS?!
IT'S SO FAST THAT IT MAKES ALL THE SERVES I'VE BEEN RECEIVING SO FAR SEEM LIKE...

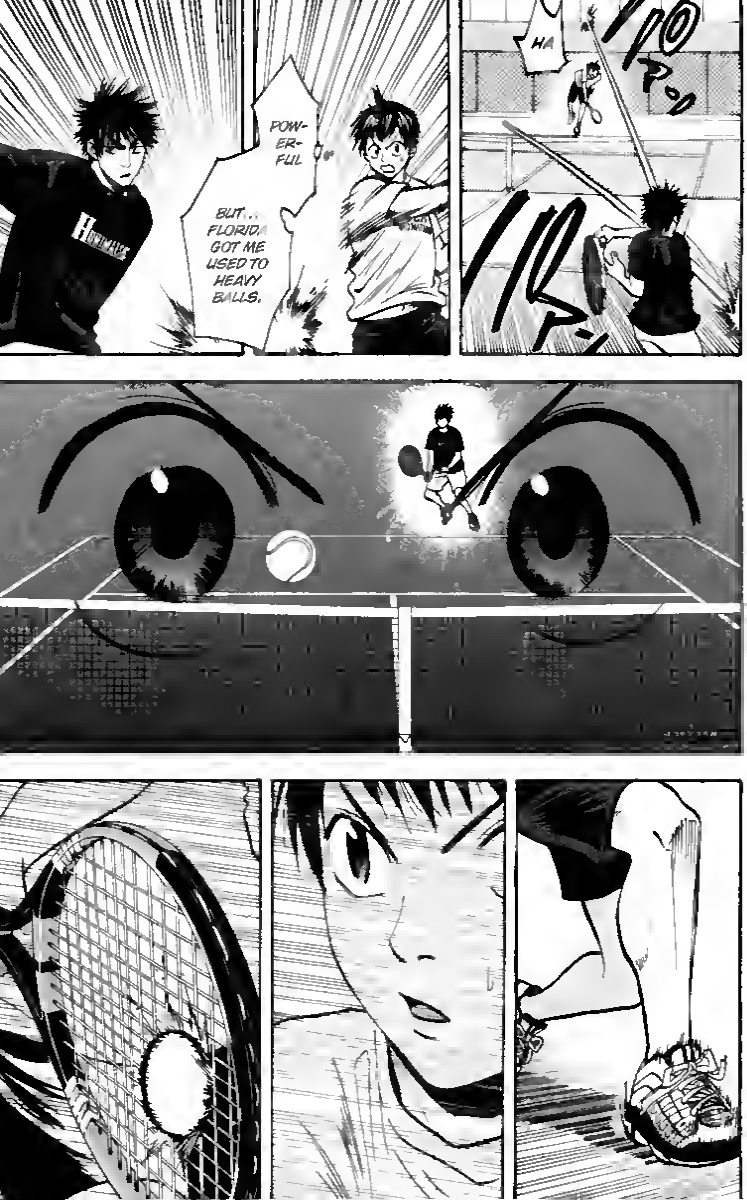
NOTHING!!

WOW... THIS IS WAY BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS.
40-LOVE
IF YOU WERE TO LABEL INBORN PHYSICAL ABILITY AS TALENT...
EVEN IF HE WAS SLACKING OFF BEFORE, THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED ONCE HE APPLIES HIMSELF.
WELL, HE WAS EXPECTED TO BECOME JAPAN'S TOP PLAYER WHEN HE WAS A KID.
THEN THERE'S NO ONE WHO'S SO BLESSED WITH TALENT AS HIM

RGH
ALRIGHT, I RETURNED IT
GRRR

HOW... HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BREAK HIM?!
GAME, TAKUMA: 1-0.
NO NO, I CAN'T BE SO PESSIMISTIC RIGHT FROM THE START!!

MY SHOTS SHOULD BE DEEP IN GENERAL, AND BE CAREFUL ABOUT THE BALL'S LOCATION WHEN IT'S SHALLOW...
ALL I GOTTA DO IS HOLD MY GAME TOO!! THE IMPORTANT THING WITH TAKUMA-SAN IS DON'T LET HIM MOVE UP WHEN THINGS ARE IN HIS FAVOR
HEAD


POW-
ER-
FUL
BUT...
FLORIDA
GOT ME
USED TO
HEAVY
BALLS.
HA
TIP
TIP

CONTROL!!
!
NICE

15-LOVE
AL-RIGHT!
ONE POINT TO START!!
ARICA DONATION

THE CONTROL I ACQUIRED IN FLORIDA
EVEN WORKS AGAINST TAKUMA-SAN!!

WELL, HE DID MANAGE TO BECOME OUR NUMBER ONE JUNIOR IN UNDER TWO YEARS.
HE'S CONFI-DENT IN HIS CONTROL...
THAT'S IMPRESSIVE.
SO NOW HE CAN ATTACK WITHOUT WAITING FOR AN EASY SHOT.
HUNIMALS

I HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS DANGEROUSLY RAPID EVOLUTION
EVEN THOUGH HE APPEARED TO BE SOMEONE WITHOUT TALENT NO MATTER HOW I LOOKED AT IT,
IKE SOUJ...
I THOUGHT WE WEREN'T TOO DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF NATURAL TALENT
DESPITE THAT, THIS GUY, WHO PICKED UP A RACKET WAY AFTER I DID, HAD ALREADY GONE FAR BEYOND MY REACH BY THE TIME I NOTICED
"RAPID EVOLUTION"... HE WAS LIKE THAT TOO.
2 YEARS AGO
I WILL NEVER WIN AGAINST HIM

HA

AND AFTERWARDS I'LL REVIEW THINGS AND SEE FOR MYSELF IF IT'S TRULY IMPOSSIBLE... OR AT LEAST THAT'S MY PLAN
THEREFORE, FOR THE TIME BEING I'LL PUSH MY LIMITS WITH THIS SCHEDULE

HA
IN THE END, ME, YOU, AND IKE, WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT WEAPONS.
EVEN THOUGH I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT TALENT, IT'S NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL...

<<TO BE CONTINUED, IN VOL. II>>

Hello, this is Katsuki

The America-Florida arc that was supposed to be only 8 chapters at first has finally concluded and now the volume count is all the way up to 10

The reason I got to continue on for such a long time is all thanks to you readers, the people who help with my background materials, my dear assistants, friends, family and editor, Mr C.
Thank you so much

It got a bit tear-jerking, but please enjoy the next volume too

MATURE MAN

AOI-SAN, YOU SHOULD AT LEAST SHAVE
COACH AOI'S A BEARDED GEEZER!
THAT'S RIGHT IT'LL MAKE YOU LOOK MUCH YOUNGER
HUH?!
I SHAVE EVERY MORNING YOU KNOW
Can't help it
IT STARTS TO GROW LITTLE BY LITTLE FROM NOON, AND BY SUNSET IT ENDS UP LIKE THIS~
LIE
ANIKI .
EI-CHAN?!
Nn.. NICE..